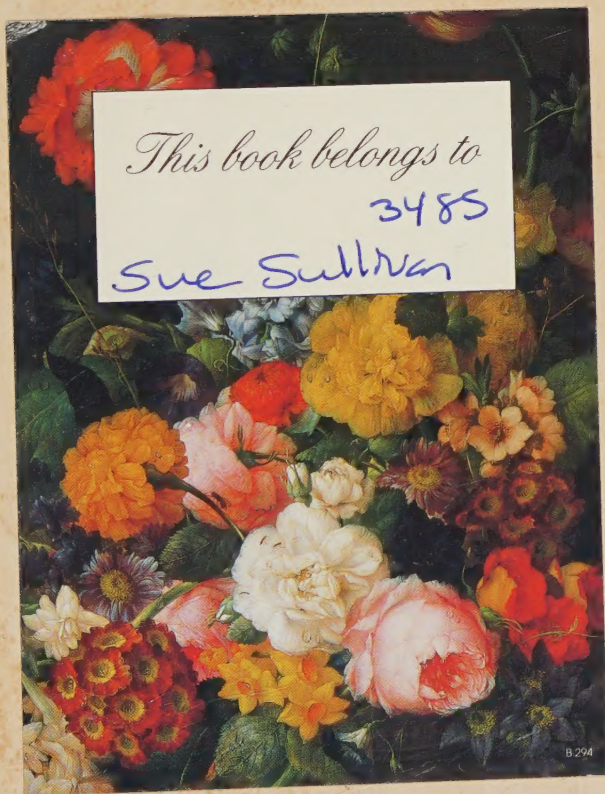



"Our Little Girl"

Robert A. Simon

18/1/96







Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

OUR LITTLE GIRL

"Our Little Girl"

By Robert A. Simon



BONI AND LIVERIGHT
PUBLISHERS :: NEW YORK

Copyright, 1923
by
BONI & LIVERIGHT, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America

To
RICHARD L. SIMON

CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. ANOTHER CHAPTER ON EARS	1
II. PRIDE AND JOY	13
III. THE STILL SMALL VOICE	23
IV. OF SMALL BEGINNINGS	37
V. INCLUDING WHAT LITTLE GIRLS ARE MADE OF	51
VI. GRADUS AD PARNASSUM	69
VII. TWO VERDICTS	81
VIII. WHERE IS THY STING?	99
IX. PRELUDE	105
X. FOR ART'S SAKE	116
XI. SWEET ARE THE USES OF PUBLICITY	126
XII. GUIDE, PHILOSOPHER AND——	141
XIII. ——FRIEND	152
XIV. AEOLIAN HALL, SATURDAY AFTERNOON	164
XV. 137 WEST 88TH STREET, SUNDAY MORN- ING	175
XVI. PRIMA DONNA	188
XVII. AND A GOOD SONG RINGING CLEAR	203
XVIII. THE GREATEST OF THESE IS CHARITY	216
XIX. MAN PROPOSES	228

Chapter		Page
XX.	HERE COMES THE BRIDE . . .	240
XXI.	HAPPILY EVER AFTER . . .	254
XXII.	SYMPHONIA DOMESTICA . . .	269
XXIII.	CLIMAX . . .	285
XXIV.	ANTICLIMAX . . .	297
XXV.	SYMPHONIE PATHETIQUE . . .	310
XXVI.	DA CAPO . . .	323

OUR LITTLE GIRL



I

ANOTHER CHAPTER ON EARS

For three months Dorothy did not differ radically from any other baby—and then Mrs. Loamford decided that the child was a Reitz rather than a Loamford. After that, you might have persuaded Mrs. Loamford that the circumstances and the doctor and the nurse attending her daughter's birth were commonplace enough. Perhaps you might have convinced her that Dorothy was formed and nourished like other infants. But there your arguments would have ended.

If you had said that Dorothy was a sweet child, a well-behaved child or even a normal child, Mrs. Loamford would have laughed in a superior way—it was the only way in which she could laugh—and produced a book with padded covers. This volume was the work of Mrs. Loamford. It was, as she used to observe, written with her own hands, although an enterprising publisher had supplied the title. The name of the work was "Darling's Diary," and it was punched in gold letters into the silky pillows which protected the leaves.

The first page was ordinary, although you might have had some difficulty in persuading Mrs. Loamford of that. It proclaimed the tidings that there had been born at 137 West 88th Street, New York City, to Chas. Sam'l. Loamford and Martha Reitz Loamford a daughter, Dorothy Reitz Loamford, weight at birth, 6½ lbs., and recorded the names of Dr. Knight and Miss Haviland, the medical officaries. Near the bottom of the page the anonymous compiler of the manual had left a space for "Mother's

"Our Little Girl"

First Thoughts." Mother had lost little time in setting down these first thoughts, which were noted in a post-Spencerian holograph:

"My baby is here and it is a wonderful baby as all of us agree and give thanks that it is here. The doctor says it is a fine child and may it prove to be a blessing for all of us. Motherhood is a wonderful thing and I am so happy and proud that I cannot speak."

Here the space became a trifle crowded and the remainder of the First Thought had to be wedged about the margins of the page.

"We shall have baby baptized Dorothy Reitz Loamford after my grandmother Dorothy and my family name Reitz and a prettier or more appropriate name could not be bestowed. Baby will be fed for the first time tomorrow God bless her little soul and may she grow up to be a blessing for all of us."

On the back of this page was a crushed sliver of crocheting. This sheet bore the caption "Baby's First Sock."

The great discovery that Dorothy was an unusual girl seems to have been established in Baby's Third Month.

"Uncle Elliott was here today and looked over baby and said 'Yes, she is a typical Reitz.' All ready I can see the Reitz look on baby's face when she is smiling and when she is ill she looks a little like her father who is very happy and proud of her. I know that she will grow up to be an unusual woman and may I be spared to help her."

It was on Baby's First Anniversary that the field in which Dorothy was to achieve greatness was indicated.

"We had a little party in honor of baby today and it was a great event with all of her surviving grandparents present. She smiled at Grandma Reitz and Uncle Elliott. Uncle Elliott brought her a toy piano and she would not

Another Chapter on Ears

look at any of her other toys, only at the piano, and cried when we tried to take her away from it. Our Dorothy loves music, she would not be a Reitz if she did not. I am saving up a little sum so that our darling may take music lessons at an early age. Uncle Elliott says, 'As the twig is bent, so the leaf will fall.'"

The presence of a hostile critic came to light a year later.

"Papa does not think that baby is musical. He is mistaken. One should not judge others by oneself. Baby is always happy when she plays her toy piano. She likes to have me sing to her and she can tell pieces of sheet music apart. Papa says she cries when he sings. I have a little joke on papa however because any one might cry when he sings."

The matter was settled definitely in the following year.

"Uncle Elliott has made baby and me very happy. He brought baby a fine new toy piano for her birthday, all the paint was off the old one and several keys broken. Baby was very happy and said 'Thank you, Uncle Elly' many times and could not be taken from her fine new gift. Uncle Elliott says baby has a wonderful ear for music, she is a little Mozart. Mozart, he says also had a wonderful ear for music when young."

Professor Abendschein stepped into the pages of Darling's Diary on her fifth birthday.

"We have found a teacher for Dorothy. Professor Abendschein, he is highly recommended and most reasonable. He says she has a wonderful ear, which I have always maintained and that she will make a fine pianist. May she never lose her love for music. If I had practised when I was young I might have become a good performer but now my fingers are stiff and I have no time to practise but this will not be the case with

"Our Little Girl"

Dorothy. She played 'America' with one finger today, and Professor Abendschein says there are many adults who cannot do that.

"Her teacher at school, Miss Prince, says that Dorothy is not so remarkable in some of her studies as in singing, she can hear her above everybody in the class when they all sing together every morning. She thinks Dorothy may have vocal talent, I hope so because I have always wanted to have a daughter who could sing and so give joy to many people, it is such a gift to be able to sing well!"

Why Darling's Diary was discontinued after this entry cannot be told. Possibly Mrs. Loamford's election to the Board of the Parents' Association of Dorothy's school may have curtailed her hours for biographical endeavor. Yet the hope expressed in the final installment was not in vain. Oddly enough, it was the death of Professor Abendschein that prompted Mrs. Loamford to make Dorothy a musician.

The Professor was a short, stout, blue-eyed German, with long white hair and an unkempt moustache that dropped about his mouth in a melancholy curve. His clientele was not large, for the Professor—the title had been bestowed on him by his students only—had little genius for self-advertisement, but his pupils were loyal. He brought with him an atmosphere of old-world coffee-cups and an echo of conservatory days when he had been the companion of many a young artist whose fame since had become international. "Scharwenka played it so," he would say when a student attempted his own version of the Polish Dance which was the Professor's *pons asinorum*. If the student played it like Scharwenka, concertos and concert études followed; if the student failed

to realize the composer's intention, lessons somehow terminated.

There were no other musical gods in the households which the Professor had visited. His instruction was a personal dispensation from a melodic deity. He had a rigid curriculum of exercises and display pieces which he set before every student. Every Abendschein pupil could perform his current "piece"—as distinguished from the works of Czerny, Clementi and Kullak—to the satisfaction of his parents, who usually were summoned by the Professor when the pupil had acquired control of the "piece." There was nothing beyond the "piece" save the next "piece." Tommy Borge, who once had taken a few lessons from the Professor, but whose reluctance to practise scales and such matters had led to an amicable rupture, used to delight in describing Carl Abendschein as a "piece worker." The Professor frowned on public performances of music which he had not taught.

"Play your piece," he would say, "and play it well—as I have taught you. That is enough."

The Professor never appeared in public as a virtuoso, although he carried with him a battered program of a concert of thirty years ago when he performed on the same platform with several men whose names now meant sold-out houses at Carnegie Hall. He did not pretend to be a great pianist, yet he managed somehow always to play a bit better than his most advanced pupil. His musical sphere was determined entirely by his routine of teaching material. When beginners asked about Debussy or Ravel, Abendschein would smile vaguely and say "we will come to that when you have mastered Kullak." He was a paternal dictator in a tiny monarchy.

And when a wife of whose existence the Professor's pupils had hardly been aware sent out little black-bordered

"Our Little Girl"

notices announcing that the Professor had given his last lessons, Dorothy, like the rest of the Abendschein students, felt an intangible but distinct grief in the passing of this mild martinet of the keyboard. The Professor had taught his disciples something more than music; he had taught them to rely on him. Without him they hardly knew which way to turn.

A week after the Professor had been buried, Mrs. Loamford considered the question of Dorothy's musical future.

"Dorothy must continue her lessons," she informed her husband. "You know how it is. Poor dear Professor used to tell us what Rubinstein said to him: 'If I do not practise for a day I know it; if I do not practise for a week, the critics know it; if I do not practise for a month, everybody knows it.'"

Loamford looked at her quizzically. To the outsider this mysterious gaze connoted some cryptic knowledge; actually, it was the defensive gesture of a man who had long since learned that his only gesture was one of defence. He had found out who was boss around there without starting anything. Mrs. Loamford invariably started everything in the Loamford ménage.

"Dorothy is sixteen," continued Mrs. Loamford. "We must consider her career."

Her husband nodded abstractedly.

"Poor dear Professor always considered her one of his most talented pupils," she went on. "He said she had a real gift for music. He said she had a great ear."

Loamford nodded again, a trifle more abstractedly. His wife spoke sharply.

"Aren't you listening?" she demanded. "I said Dorothy had a great ear."

"'Ear, 'ear," commented Loamford.

Another Chapter on Ears

Mrs. Loamford took no retaliatory measures. She had become hardened to her husband's habit of concocting puns when there was nothing to be said, and this pun had become almost traditional.

"Elliott is coming tonight," Mrs. Loamford resumed. "We must have his advice. As I see it, it's a question of whether we shall find a new piano teacher for Dorothy or whether we shall have her take singing lessons."

"Do you really want her to take singing lessons?" inquired Loamford.

"How many times have I told you that?" demanded his wife. "She has a remarkable natural voice. There's no use going over that again. And she's at the right age to start studying seriously if she's going to get anywhere."

Loamford carefully shoved the ashes from his cigar and moved over to a little desk where he kept the family account books, over which he worked every night, although there was no necessity for these labors. During the day he was head accountant for the Cosmopolitan Bonding Company. His thoroughness, accuracy and originality had carried him far in his work, and his chief interest in life was figures—unless one considered travel lectures an interest in life. Whenever domestic discussions reached a point where he could contribute less than usual he would retreat to his little desk in the parlor and begin to check up the grocer's book with a small, miraculously sharp pencil.

"Oh, well," concluded Mrs. Loamford, "I suppose it's no use trying to tell you anything. If I were Dorothy's father, I'd show *some* interest in my daughter's career!"

"But you're not," murmured Loamford, turning about with a mirthless grin, and sniffing a bit as was his custom whenever he thought he had made a singularly felicitous

"Our Little Girl"

retort. At such moments he looked not unlike a highly intelligent horse.

"No, but *you* are!" cried Mrs. Loamford triumphantly.

The flutter of pages at the desk indicated a victory for Mrs. Loamford. They fluttered frequently of nights.

"I don't see why Dorothy shouldn't be a great singer," Mrs. Loamford resumed, partly for her husband's benefit and more for her own satisfaction. "I've been reading of this new singer at the Metropolitan who was known once as the girl who had no voice. Now they say she gets two thousand dollars a night and everybody raves about her. It shows what you can do with good instruction and will power. Dorothy has will power. Look at the way she passed her History after flunking it twice. And she has a voice. There's no reason why she shouldn't become a really great singer. All she needs is a little encouragement. I've often said that many geniuses never are recognized because their parents don't help them out. It's the duty of a parent to do everything possible for her child. We go about making a great hullabaloo about foreigners and when we have a genius right in our very home we don't even notice it. It's the system that's at fault. It's time we began to recognize——"

Here the bell rang.

"Elliott's here," announced Loamford.

A puff of cigarette smoke preceded the entrance of Elliott Reitz. It was to her brother that Mrs. Loamford turned for satisfaction. He was one of the big men in the men's hats industry and he was famous as an executive. In the trade magazines he was known as "Brass Tacks" Reitz and the only question involved was whether he or his sister was prouder of the nickname. He was large, stout, and aggressively bald.

Another Chapter on Ears

"I'm so glad you came!" sighed Mrs. Loamford.

"Thanks," said Elliott. "How are you, Loamford? Look a little thin. Ought to take up golf. Best tonic in the world."

He stretched himself across a chair.

"What's the argument tonight?"

His sister looked at him as to a judge of appeals.

"Don't you think that Dorothy ought to take up singing?" she asked.

"Sure."

Mrs. Loamford turned to her husband, as who should say, "That settles it."

"Singing," asserted Mr. Reitz, although no one had solicited his opinion, "is a great art."

He breathed heavily after this utterance, like the successful after-dinner speaker that he was.

"It's something you can't learn in a day—a week—a month—a year—two years," he continued. "It takes talent, application, practice. It means that you've got a big job ahead of you and that you've got to tackle it with all the stuff that's in you."

"Dorothy has a beautiful voice," interrupted Mrs. Loamford.

"Looking at it from my point of view," continued her brother, "I should say that isn't enough. She has a beautiful voice, you say. Very good. But will she make the most of it? Will she go in for singing the way a young man might go in for law, medicine, engineering? That's the answer. To put it very plainly, has she got the guts?"

Loamford was always a bit annoyed at this question, which was his brother-in-law's favorite.

"Dorothy has plenty of will power," said Mrs. Loamford.

"Our Little Girl"

Loamford sniffed assent.

"Very good," continued Mr. Reitz. "Now it isn't enough to have her taught to sing in good shape. She's got to be prepared to face the world as a singer. She can't go in for social foolishness or any lahdeda stuff. She's got a big job cut out for her. Can she make good? That's what you want to ask!"

"She will succeed!" insisted his sister. "She *must* succeed!"

"Good enough," went on the speaker. "It costs money to put any proposition on the market. Now, look at those green hats everybody's wearing this spring. Do you see any other color hat on a fashionably dressed man? You do not! Green has caught on. It looks like a natural enough thing, doesn't it? Well, believe me, it took a long sales campaign to sell green to the men. Green's a pretty color. All right. But you've got to convince the public of that. You've got to make 'em want green hats. We did it. But it cost us a damn big lot of money to make 'em want green.

"Now it's the same way with everything else. It's all right to talk about art. There's an art to designing hats, too, but that isn't what keeps the hat business going. It's salesmanship. If Dorothy's going to be a singer it won't do just to let her sing. You've got to build her up into a big thing. I don't say it'll cost as much as it would to put over a new style hat. I guess you can afford it if you keep her from getting any freak ideas. But it's no use looking at it as an artistic matter only. Put the proposition this way: Has she got the goods and can she deliver 'em?"

He paused and drew a cigarette from a heavily embossed silver case.

"I'm not so much interested in the professional side of it," Loamford began.

Reitz shut the cigarette case with a loud snap. In fact, he had produced it so that he could close it that way.

"In my business," he said, "we don't do things just to do them. Make no mistake about that. We do things to fill a demand. If the demand isn't there, we make it. The point is that goods have to serve a purpose or they're no use. Now, if Dorothy's going to have hundreds or thousands of dollars' worth of singing lessons just to show off for company, you'd be doing better investing that money in dresses and shoes and stockings so that she can make a showing when she goes out with the boys. Don't get me wrong on this. I'm not suggesting that you should look at your daughter as a business proposition. But what I've always said is just this: If a thing's worth doing at all it's worth doing up to the hilt. You don't want Dorothy to be just a girl who sings. You want her to be one of the best singers going. No two ways about that!"

"No two ways about that" meant that the argument was concluded, that rebuttal was in order, and that rebuttal wasn't possible.

"I'm so glad you look at it so sensibly, Elliott," Mrs. Loamford acquiesced.

"It's the only way to look at it!" snapped Reitz. "Isn't it, Loamford?"

He swung around suddenly at his brother-in-law.

"I'm not saying," remarked Loamford. "Whatever is best for Dorothy, of course——"

"Well, if you're going to make her a singer," announced Reitz, "make her a singer!"

He opened and shut the cigarette case again. He jerked his head forward sharply, placed his hands on his hips as though awaiting a question, and then settled

“Our Little Girl”

back in the chair and crossed his knees with the air of a man who had just consummated a fifteen-million-dollar merger.

Loamford carefully closed the account books, tucked his pencil away discreetly and rose neatly from his desk.

“Now that you have settled the future for the tenth time this year,” he said, “you’ll excuse me if I go to bed.”

He extracted a small penknife and trimmed off the ragged end of a half-burned cigar. He placed the cigar on a smoking-stand, switched off the light over the desk and moved down the hall to the bedroom.

“Isn’t it a pity,” observed Mrs. Loamford, “that Samuel has so little interest in Dorothy’s career?”

“It’s just as good,” retorted her brother. “A boy who’s tied to his mother’s apron strings never gets anywhere. And, believe me, a girl that hangs on to her father’s coat-tails too long is in the same boat. She hasn’t any more chance than a snowball in hell. Mark my words!”

II

PRIDE AND JOY

An unfortunate tradesman on Broadway within a few blocks of Eighty-eighth Street looked resentfully after the copious figure of Mrs. Loamford striding uptown with a swinging gait eloquent of indignation.

"If she wanted bird's eye maple," he informed his assistant, "why didn't she say so? All she said was frame the damn diploma, so I framed the damn diploma. She didn't say what wood—left it to me—used my judgment—then listen to the way she raised hell——"

Similar in tone if not in vocabulary were the reflections of Mrs. Loamford. Why had the idiot framed Dorothy's diploma from Miss Blagden's School for Girls in mission when she had specifically—she could remember her very words—told him that she wanted it done in bird's eye maple? It would look all out of place in Dorothy's room. What was the use of getting a girl an expensive set of bird's eye maple furniture as a graduation present and then hanging up a diploma from Miss Blagden's School—and that meant something!—in mission? Dumb. That's what he was. Dumb.

Her anger simmered down when she saw Dorothy in the newly furnished room, arranging her gift-books on the bird's eye maple shelf which had been especially built in as a sort of memorial for her school days. Dorothy certainly was a pretty girl and a graceful vision as she smoothed out the irregular rows of volumes. She might be even prettier when she filled out a little here and

“Our Little Girl”

there, but she was already a little woman, a little Reitz woman—and not so little a woman, at that!

“See what I’ve got for you, Dorothy!” cried out Mrs. Loamford, as she stopped by the open door of her daughter’s room on the third floor of the house. “A surprise!”

The framer might have erred, but there was something about the diploma, even as a piece of parchment curled inside a red ribbon, that was undeniably eventful.

“Oh, mother!”

Dorothy’s voice, always smooth and cool, had a little tremor in it. The days before and after graduation had been full of lovely acquisitions, such as wrist-watches (from Uncle Elliott), a handsomely tooled set of Washington Irving (from cousin Ben Wheeler of Utica), an ivory desk set (from Aunt Elsa Reitz of Baltimore, who was said to be very old, very rich and very much interested in her grandniece) and father’s personal gift, a small checking account, along with a complete set of accounting books. What was mother’s surprise? And anyhow, ostentatious gratitude had become something of a habit in the past week.

“Look, Dorothy!”

Mrs. Loamford unwrapped her parcel dramatically, and held up the framed diploma, much as she might have held up an infant snatched from a whirlpool.

“It’s lovely, mother!”

Kisses. Thank-you kisses, to be sure, but hardly distinguishable from the genuine.

“It’s so good of you to have it framed!”

If Dorothy was so pleased, Mrs. Loamford thought, it would be just as well not to tell her of the framer’s blunder.

“I thought my little girl would like to hang it up in her room,” beamed Mrs. Loamford. “Put it over your

new desk, Dorothy. It will be a reminder of your school days."

Mrs. Loamford, exhausted by the effort of presenting the diploma to Dorothy, sank into the new easy chair.

"My, what a comfortable chair!" she said kittenishly. "You certainly are a lucky girl, Dorothy."

Dorothy was hardened to this sort of felicitation. She responded automatically with a kiss.

"And I have another surprise," continued Mrs. Loamford. "Guess what it is."

Dorothy wondered whether there was much distinction between a donation and a conundrum, but the simplest way to ascertain this unknown benefaction was to ask.

"Uncle Elliott is coming to dinner tonight," explained Mrs. Loamford, as though prophesying a millennium, "and after dinner we're all going to see 'Little Miss Mercy.' It's a very sweet play."

Kisses.

"There!" said Mrs. Loamford, reciprocating Dorothy's tokens of affection with a dynamic caress, "now my little girl can put on her beautiful new evening frock. You don't know how proud I am of you!"

Dorothy shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly as her mother flounced from the room. She was a little weary of these surprises which involved dinner with Uncle Elliott. She liked Uncle Elliott—he was her uncle, you know—but there were more exciting people who might come to dinner. Why couldn't her parents do what Clemence Earle's father had done—have a famous tenor as guest of honor at a little supper for his daughter? If she was going to study singing seriously, a famous tenor would be more interesting than Uncle Elliott. They might at least have invited Arnold Deering. She would ask her mother—

"Our Little Girl"

But perhaps it would be ungracious to ask her mother, after all the things that had been presented so lavishly. Still, it would have been thoughtful to have asked Arnold. It wasn't much fun going out with a lot of old people. How could one hint about these things? But it was too late to ask Arnold now, anyway.

She wondered whether she ought to place Arnold's picture on her dresser. There was nothing romantic between them, but Arnold was the nicest young man she had met. He had a very young sister at Miss Blagden's School and Milly Deering had had a crush on Dorothy. The crush led to the introduction of Arnold to Dorothy, and Dorothy had introduced Arnold to the family. Arnold was about twenty-five—he looked younger, but that was because he dressed "collegiate," as the academic nomenclature of Miss Blagden's under-graduates had it. He was a college man, which was a guarantee of the solidity of his intellectual attainments, he danced beautifully, and he really was good-looking. Dorothy looked at the cabinet picture which he had given her at one of his early visits. It didn't do him justice. It didn't show the shimmer of his wavy black hair, and his interesting smile was reduced to a senseless grimace. The photographer apparently had insisted on Arnold folding his arms, which made him look stout, and he wasn't. He was athletic-looking. A lot of girls didn't know anybody as nice as Arnold, and he was getting along wonderfully in the firm of Emerson, Goldberg and Emerson, bankers and brokers, in which his father had an interest. And Arnold didn't *have* to work! Dorothy admired him for traveling all the way to Wall Street at the far end of the city every morning when he might have stayed at home or amused himself by motoring in the country. For a frugal grandfather had left to Arnold a complicated es-

tate which provided what the girls of Miss Blagden's School called a marrying income.

Arnold's picture would look well on the dresser and it would impress the girls who came to see Dorothy—but her mother would be sure to make such remarks that it would have to be removed. Mrs. Loamford wasn't co-operative where Arnold was concerned. Otherwise she would have thought of asking him to attend the little dinner and theatre party for Dorothy.

Mr. Loamford, in fact, had made some such suggestion, but his wife had declined to consider it.

"I like Arnold Deering," she had admitted, "but it's too pointed to invite him. Don't be absurd, Samuel. It'll give Dorothy wrong ideas, and she's too young to think of anything like that."

This vague reference to wrong ideas and "anything like that" usually served to dispose of any conversational starts which might lead to a discussion of Dorothy's matrimonial prospects.

"He's a good, clean young man of good family," Mrs. Loamford conceded, "and very nice, too. I really like him, but Dorothy's only a child, and——"

Here came an inevitable clincher.

"Then there's her career to be considered."

The dinner party, therefore, was purely a family affair. Dorothy's frock, a sleeveless creation in mauve, was modest—a little more modest than necessary, Dorothy thought—but effective. It set off her large gray-blue eyes prettily and it blended with her thick, dark brown hair, which had been waved for the occasion and puffed out becomingly over the ears. It was a little long—what was the use of having slender ankles and fetching legs if you couldn't show them?—but it gave to her misses'

"Our Little Girl"

size figure just the slightly billowy effect which Dorothy admired. As Dorothy contemplated herself in the mirror, she regretted more than ever that Arnold hadn't been invited. It was almost a pity to look so well for the benefit of the family.

She could imagine this function carried off properly. It would take place in an expensive apartment on lower Riverside Drive rather than in a private four-story house on Eighty-eighth Street, where one could hear the elevated trains rattle by when the windows were open. It would be in a dining-room with painted walls, illuminated by shaded wall brackets rather than in what had once been a "back-parlor," with nondescript green wall-paper and a glaring overhead candelabra. It would be served by a uniformed butler rather than by Lena, a pudgy household institution. There would be all kinds of distinguished people present (and Arnold) rather than the family. It would be followed by a party which occupied all of the boxes at the season's most successful offering rather than attendance on a comedy which had been damned with the adjective "wholesome."

"Dorothy-y!"

Her mother's voice ended the hypothetical reconstruction of the evening. She went down to the sitting-room (second floor front) to be greeted by a heavy smack from Uncle Elliott, who wore a senatorial full dress suit. Her mother had on a tight-fitting black net dress which, as Tommy Borge had once observed, indicated curves rather than speed. Her father entertained in evening clothes which seemed too long and too baggy, and his collar appeared to be too large. His white bow tie was of the ready-made order. He was sensitive about his inability to tie a presentable bow-knot and looked suspiciously on anyone who referred to his formal neckwear.

His thin brown hair was matted down restively and he wore the rimless glasses which betokened a presumably memorable occasion.

The dinner started with grape-fruit. Dorothy was not the only one at the table who felt the need of guests derived from other than family sources. If there had been outsiders present Mr. Loamford would have coughed gently, and said, "Don't think we have grape-fruit every night," snickered, and coughed gently again. He regarded this as a delicately humorous sally. Uncle Elliott, however, needed no alien stimulus.

"Grape-fruit," he remarked, digging a trench in the hemisphere before him. "We didn't have anything like this when we graduated from school, eh, Loamford?"

"We weren't like Dorothy," responded Mr. Loamford with an air of gallantry.

"You *did* win a medal for penmanship," demurred his wife.

Mr. Loamford grinned as though pride would be unseemly.

"Well, the only medals I won," boomed Uncle Elliott, "were the hidings I got in the school of hard knocks."

He hollowed out his grape-fruit solemnly as he thought of his alma mater. Before the advent of publicized guides to gustatory niceties, he would have squeezed the liquid contents of the rind into his spoon.

"You deserve another medal, Loamford," he continued with a sudden change of mood, "for having such a fine-looking daughter. I guess Miss Blagden's School is a pretty first-rate one to graduate from, too, isn't it, Dorothy?"

What could one say in answer to such a question?

"It's the best in the city," said Mrs. Loamford, smugly.

"Our Little Girl"

It was a distinction to have a diploma from Miss Blagden's School, Dorothy thought. Her father had never completed high school and her mother had drifted about in various public schools, never, apparently, obtaining any certificates of recognition. Dorothy reflected how easily she had gone through Miss Blagden's curriculum. The imposing catalogue issued by that institution showed that an alumna must have a broad grasp on all of the arts and sciences. Dorothy had "taken" nearly everything available, although the intricacies of algebra had caused the abandonment of that subject in favor of music appreciation, which contributed an equal number of credits toward a diploma, and which required little more than attention to performances of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony on a player-piano. The college preparatory course might have been more difficult, but the "liberal arts" program was better adapted for one looking forward to a musical career. It was especially recommended to girls who "hoped to become home-makers," and to those whose choice of studies was "not governed by college entrance regulations."

There was something satisfying and ennobling in the possession of a diploma from Miss Blagden's School. It was an order of merit. It was, as the valedictorian had said, "something that no time nor tide could take away from you."

Uncle Elliott, who always led the conversation at family affairs, asked Mr. Loamford about a new bond issue. Mr. Loamford answered statistically, and the economic debate lasted through several courses. It bored Dorothy terribly.

But with the demi-tasse (why wasn't it served in the parlor after the meal?) Uncle Elliott arose, with his cigar pointing at an imaginary heap of penciled notes.

"Before the waiters clear away the dishes," he began, not so jocularly as one might think, "I wish to take this opportunity to say a few words about our charming guest of honor, Miss Dorothy Reitz Loamford."

Mrs. Loamford applauded self-consciously, and her husband coughed out a "Hear, hear."

"This is only the beginning of bigger things," Uncle Elliott continued. "I can see in my mind's eye another table, a larger table, at which distinguished people from all parts of the city—no, of the country—will be sitting. The guest of honor will be——"

He bowed and waved his cigar.

"Dorothy Reitz Loamford, the famous singer. I only hope that I may have the honor of presiding on this occasion—may I have it, Dorothy?"

He was a dear old thing, although his speech sounded a little silly.

"Certainly, Uncle Elliott."

She smiled pleasantly. Her smile was good and she knew it.

"And this banquet—for such it will be—I forecast for the not too distant future. How long does it take to be a great singer, Dorothy?"

The doorbell saved Dorothy.

"Our taxi!" exclaimed Mrs. Loamford. "We must hurry! Samuel, have you the tickets?"

Uncle Elliott stood staring at his cigar. Evidently it would be impossible to recapture the attention of his audience. His audience, in fact, had risen and was looking for coats and hats. Uncle Elliott overtook Dorothy as she was leaving the room, and hugged her.

"You certainly are sweet enough to eat," he grunted through a kiss. "When you're a great singer, I guess you won't care about your old Uncle Elliott, eh?"

"Our Little Girl"

He put a hand on each of her shoulders and surveyed her at arm's length.

"Well, girl," he said, nodding his head up and down, as though he were arriving at some portentous decision, "no matter what happens, we'll never be prouder of our little Dorothy than we are this very minute!"

III

THE STILL SMALL VOICE

Tommy Borge, in one of the little feature articles which he wrote for hospitable editors of evening newspapers, saved himself no little creative effort by setting down Dorothy exactly as she appeared to him a few evenings after her graduation from Miss Blagden's School. The article bore the caption "Molly's a Thursday Night Girl—What's Your Night?" and it was credited in needlessly large type to Thomas A. Borge. Tommy met Dorothy at the dance of the graduating class to which she had invited Arnold, and to which Tommy had been compelled to escort a kinswoman of no importance. It was difficult to schedule this unprepossessing intellectual for dances, but Tommy had known Arnold at college. As it was diplomatically impossible for Arnold to avoid a dance with Tommy's impedimenta after a suggestive introduction, Tommy found himself temporarily the partner of Dorothy, who, according to her mother, was the prettiest girl in the class. Mrs. Loamford's contention may not have been law, but it was defensible.

In the course of a fox-trot Tommy managed to inform Dorothy that he wrote pieces for the papers; that he was writing a one-act play; that he knew several big men intimately, and that he'd like to call sometime and ask her to a first night. Hadn't she ever been to a first night? What a pity! So many interesting people at first nights! Yes, he knew most of them by sight. One of the critics spoke to him frequently at premières. Certainly, he'd be glad to introduce her. No, he didn't care

"Our Little Girl"

much for dancing. Guessed he wasn't built for it. No, he wasn't too stout, but he didn't have time to go about much socially. First nights, you know, newspaper articles, plays . . . guessed he'd do Dorothy in one of his pieces. Not exactly, of course. Something like . . . sorry the dance was over . . . see her later maybe . . . ring her up sometime? be delighted to . . . so nice to have met her. . . .

Molly, the Thursday Night Girl, according to Tommy, was the kind of girl the young-men-you-see-with-beauties marry.

"If there were marriage statistics of the right sort available," wrote Tommy, "it would develop that one man out of every one and three-quarters marries the girl with whom he keeps company of Thursday nights. Saturday night's girl is fair of face and an investigation of the budgets of our young lovers would show that Saturday night's girl was responsible for the impecuniousness of youth. But Saturday night's girl is a Wilhelmine of the Wisp——"

Tommy was very proud of that.

"——who vanishes suddenly, leaving only memories of beauty and nothing more. She is the most beautiful girl you know; she is the girl you want to be seen with; she is the girl you never marry. She is the gold-tipped cigarette of young man's existence. He ends up with a collection of ashes—and the waiter literally carries away the gold tip.

"Monday night's girl is a relative whom one must entertain lest one's relations become strained. Tuesday's girl and Wednesday's girl are Platonic friends—so Platonic that one can discuss Plato with them. But Thursday——

"Molly is the Thursday night girl. She is not so

The Still Small Voice

regal as the deity of Saturday night, but she is far lovelier than the family skeleton of Monday or the best minds of Tuesday and Wednesday. At first she is only Molly. Later she becomes a power who upsets the best laid plans of calendar makers and brings the week's climax over to Thursday instead of Saturday. Once you have met Molly, a week-end is merely two or three consecutive days and Thursday becomes a holiday.

"Molly is of medium height, slender, but only sensibly so, not brilliant, but cleverer than she knows. She has grayish blue eyes which seem to say nothing and everything. Her hair is dark brown, with a touch of red in it. Her voice is quiet and her laugh is not too loud—yet there is a song back of the voice and the laugh.

"At first you do not notice Molly particularly. She is always there Thursday night, if you feel like calling. She makes anise cakes and they are always on the table in a little porcelain dish. Molly may not know it, but the anise cakes are subtle. Not long after you have met Molly, you see anise cakes in a bakery—and your thoughts turn to Molly. You wonder whether there are others whose thoughts turn to Molly. If there are, she says little about them. You feel that you can propose to the Thursday Night Girl whenever you please—and so you delay it. It is only when she announces her engagement to some nonentity from out-of-town that you realize how long you have wanted Molly. And she passes into memory as a lost opportunity—unless you have learned the tradition of Thursday night and make the most of your opportunity.

"When the Saturday night girl marries, you count up the hours and dollars you have spent with that dear heart and think of the string of pearls you have cast before that shrine. But when Molly suddenly marries

"Our Little Girl"

somebody else, there is no resentment, unless it be at yourself. Molly never asked anything, even by implication. She was grateful for whatever you might offer. She invited you to dinner—and it was a good dinner.

"However, the bachelors seem to be growing aware of the potency of Thursday night. A theatrical manager who was asked about that matter admitted that Thursday night had been becoming more popular of recent years than hitherto. An all-night restaurateur noted an increase in his Thursday receipts. Molly is coming into her own."

This article appeared only in the first edition of the newspaper. In the second edition it was replaced by a disquisition on the early summer habits of bayberry bushes. The hospitable feature editor told Tommy that the article had to be excised to permit a better make-up on the page. Tommy might have understood the explanation had he seen an inter-office memorandum from the managing editor to the feature editor, which read:

"Kill that Thursday night nonsense. Are you running a matrimonial agency?"

Nevertheless, Tommy sent an ostentatiously marked copy to Dorothy, who wondered what its import might be but concluded that Tommy must be very clever to have things printed in the paper and his name signed to them. She mentioned the receipt of the article to Arnold, who commented that he could write newspaper stuff too if business didn't take up so much time and that Tommy probably didn't get much for that kind of work anyhow.

Arnold's deprecating observations, however, didn't deter Dorothy from permitting Tommy to call on Thursday night. Tommy offered to take her to the first night of "Babies While You Wait," a new comedy which he

assured her was unusually clever, but Dorothy was compelled to obey the Loamford house rule: All young men must spend at least one evening at 137 West 88th Street before they were privileged to take Dorothy to places less directly under the supervision of Mrs. Loamford. He wore a soft shirt—a bit of costuming which signified either a Socialist turn of mind or a savor of impropriety, or most likely both. His features were regular without having any distinction, except that enigmatic smile on the corner of his mouth which belied the frankness of his full lips. His hair was inclined to be curly, but there was no charm about its curliness and Tommy's trick of passing his hand through it whenever he grew discursive wrecked the part. Neatness, which Mrs. Loamford admired so much, was absent. Arnold Deering always was shaved so cleanly that he looked like a walking advertisement for a barber; Tommy always had the appearance of having shaved hastily that morning and at the same time not being sufficiently bearded to warrant another passage with the razor. He smoked popular-priced cigarettes from their original package and offered them to Dorothy and Mrs. Loamford—a mark of careless breeding, if nothing worse.

The Loamford system demanded that the young man make conversation. If his family were known to Mrs. Loamford, the customary inquiries concerning the physical well-being of mother and father usually served to start an evening of talk. Otherwise, the social explorer was compelled to blaze his own trail, starting at the standard sign-post which was "And what, if I may ask, is your line of business, Mr. —?"

Tommy, having confessed that he wrote newspaper articles and having elicited the comment that such work must be very interesting because one meets so many

“Our Little Girl”

people, mentioned that he had had a most amusing interview recently with an old Italian singing teacher who told him that American girls had the most wonderful voices in the world but that they went out so much that they rarely made the most of their natural gifts.

“Dorothy sings, you know,” said Mrs. Loamford.

“Professionally?” inquired Tommy.

“Not yet,” answered her mother, “but we have hopes.”

“Studying now?” asked Tommy.

“We expect to start next fall,” said Mrs. Loamford, editorially.

“Concert or opera?” queried Tommy.

“Oh, you must know something about music!” exclaimed Mrs. Loamford. “Are you a music critic, too?”

“I do an occasional piece about music,” he said. “Most of the interviews with singers and so on.”

Here Tommy went out of the category of young men visitors and became an authority.

“You must know how many of them started, then,” suggested Mrs. Loamford.

Tommy nodded.

“I wish you could hear Dorothy sing,” she continued.

“I’d like to,” assented Tommy.

“But I don’t sing—yet,” Dorothy demurred.

She realized that a performance was inevitable, but it wouldn’t do to seem anxious.

“That might be said of a good many Metropolitan stars,” Tommy observed.

Mrs. Loamford was delighted.

“Really, Dorothy, you ought to sing for Mr. Borge,” she urged.

“But I haven’t studied,” objected Dorothy.

This young man probably was critical. Why sing for him?

"My former observation," said Tommy, "may be extended to say the same of certain Metropolitan artists."

"You see?" Mrs. Loamford went on. "Mr. Borge understands."

"But I have no accompanist," objected Dorothy, by way of erecting an insuperable barrier to any exhibition.

"You really ought to learn to play your own," said Mrs. Loamford. "Mr. Borge, would you believe that Dorothy took music lessons for eleven years, but that she doesn't play a note today? I often say it's a shame for a girl with so much talent to neglect her music that way. Think of it! She studied the piano for eleven years—and she can't play for herself."

"Sounds like a pupil of the late Professor Abend-schein," observed Tommy.

Mrs. Loamford beamed.

"Remarkable!" she exclaimed. "The very man! Tell me—is that the talk among musicians?"

"I can't tell you. But I took lessons from the Professor myself for a little while. But I preferred Irving Berlin to Czerny and after a while we parted company."

"Oh—you play!"

"Only a little. I pick out what I want to hear."

Mrs. Loamford opened the piano very dramatically.

"You must accompany Dorothy, Mr. Borge," she commanded.

"I don't read much at sight," Tommy murmured.

"Oh, don't be modest! I'm sure you're a wonderful pianist!"

"He doesn't want to play, mother," interpolated Dorothy.

Mentally, she was already clearing her throat.

"If you will sing," said Tommy, "I'll take a chance of ruining your performance."

"Our Little Girl"

"Sing 'Kiss Me Again,' Dorothy," urged Mrs. Loamford.

She placed the music on the rack.

"Now!"

Tommy ploughed through the introduction with several blunders, although the music was no stranger to him, but redeemed himself with a fine gesture as he came to the chords preceding the opening notes for the voice. Dorothy took up the slightly passionate lyric respectably. Her lower tones were shaky, but in the middle register she produced her voice smoothly and sweetly, although the cruelly deep notes at the beginning of the chorus were inaudible. The final high note, taken desperately, and with full voice, resulted in a breathless shriek, harsh and at least half a tone sharp. Tommy tactfully pounded several heavy chords on the piano and almost drowned out Dorothy's violent efforts. Mrs. Loamford stood by and began to clap her hands encouragingly before the sounds of the piano had died out.

As Tommy, much relieved at the cessation of hostilities, rose from the piano stool, Mr. Loamford looked into the room.

"What seems to be the trouble?" he inquired mildly.

A little gasp of dismay from Dorothy and Mrs. Loamford.

"Why, Samuel," said Mrs. Loamford, "Mr. Borge has been kind enough to play for Dorothy."

"Beg your pardon," commented her husband. "You'll excuse me, Mr. Borge, if I resume some work I've brought home with me—very important—sorry——"

"My husband was only joking, Mr. Borge," explained Mrs. Loamford. "He couldn't have heard anything in the next room."

Tommy reflected that he couldn't have helped hearing

the selection as far away as the 86th Street Elevated station, but he smiled.

"Galli-Curci," he said, "once told me that she had comparatively little sympathy from her parents when she started singing. Miss Dorothy has a very good voice—really."

"Oh, do you really think so!"

Tommy nodded.

"Of course, training will do wonders for it."

"That's what I always tell Dorothy. That's why I think she ought to start studying as soon as possible."

"By all means," Tommy murmured.

"We were planning to have her start with Madame Schneider."

Dorothy pouted. Madame Schneider was neither fashionable nor inspiring.

"I want to study with Michel Soedlich," she interrupted. "Isn't he a big teacher?"

"Very big," agreed Tommy.

"But I do believe," said Mrs. Loamford, "that it would be better for Dorothy to start with a woman teacher."

"I don't see why," Dorothy objected.

"Must we go over all that again?" demanded her mother. "Mind you, Mr. Borge, I don't pretend to know anything about this Mr. Soedlich. But, after all one hears about the goings on at studios, all I can say is, one can't be too careful!"

"There's a great deal in that, as the monkey said," agreed Tommy.

"As the monkey said?" asked Mrs. Loamford.

"It's a new way of saying 'I agree,'" Tommy explained. "Soedlich is a corking musician. He'd probably be one of our greatest men if he had any stability."

Mrs. Loamford turned triumphantly to her daughter.

"Our Little Girl"

"There you have it from a disinterested party! That's just what I've been hearing."

"Of course," Tommy continued, "I don't want to do the man an injustice. He's very able. He's turned out some splendid artists."

Dorothy smiled gratefully. Tommy's authoritative statement might convince her mother where Dorothy's had failed.

"That may all be very well," responded Mrs. Loamford determinedly, "but it's my opinion that it's just as good not to turn out such wonderful artists if—you understand me, I'm sure, Mr. Borge. And Madame Schneider is a very charming and talented woman. She's a singer herself."

"A good voice," suggested Tommy, "is bound to assert itself eventually if the owner doesn't abandon it."

"Then you think Dorothy's voice is worth cultivating?"

"Absolutely."

"I hope you'll come to hear Dorothy sing again after she's had some instruction from Madame Schneider."

"Glad to."

"I hope it isn't an imposition on you, Mr. Borge. You must have a great many requests and you must be very busy——"

Tommy assured her that it was always a pleasure to hear charming young singers, that he could always make time, and that he was always glad to be of service to his friends. Mrs. Loamford now placed the seal of approval on Tommy by excusing herself.

The evening then began to take on a social savor. Tommy was not long in getting to his *pièce de résistance*, which was the story of how he had interviewed a lady novelist whose works were celebrated for their incandescence rather than their brilliance.

"There must have been half a dozen reporters there before they let me at her," Tommy related, "and as the one ahead of me—a famous sob sister—came out, I could see a tiger draped over a couch. It was planted of course. You know what 'planted' means?"

Dorothy thought that it meant placed there for a purpose. She was finding Tommy's technical jargon simpler to comprehend.

"Exactly," continued Tommy, who immediately raised Dorothy's intelligence rating several points. "I figured that she'd put it there to make the reporters ask questions. I knew she wanted to get over the idea that she was the soul of a tiger or something like that. And sure enough—the first thing she did was to ask me to sit on the tiger skin with her."

Dorothy smiled and drew back a bit.

"Oh, I don't suppose she had any romantic purpose in mind," Tommy went on. "I don't think I appeal to women that way."

He stopped to light a cigarette. Dorothy had no comment to make on his alleged lack of appeal to women "that way," and he continued with a little less enthusiasm:

"She asked me if I minded if she held my hand while I interviewed her. She said it created a bond of sympathy between the interviewer and herself. I couldn't very well refuse, although I'm not generally asked to hold hands. Not by people I interview, anyhow."

He shifted some ashes to a tray.

"'Look in my eyes,' she said, and I did. What else could I do? 'Now ask me anything!' she said. Of course, she expected me to ask her what she thought of New York or American women or something like that, but I threw her out of her routine. I asked her whether

"Our Little Girl"

she composed on a typewriter or with a pen. She was surprised, as I thought she would be. Finally she said she dictated her novels. 'But,' she said, 'my dear boy, that has nothing to do with art—or I should say love. Love and art are one with me. That is the keynote of my character. Why do you think that hundreds of thousands of my books have been sold in every part of the civilized world?' Of course, I couldn't tell her why, because that wouldn't have been especially discreet, but she——"

Here a loud cough was heard from the next room.

"That's father," explained Dorothy.

"I thought as much," said Tommy. "Your mother wouldn't be likely to cough like a baritone, and—well, anyhow, we were at the point where she was telling me about the sale of her books, and——"

Again the cough.

Dorothy fidgeted. It wasn't necessary for her father to behave that way. Was she still a child?

Tommy continued.

"—then she looked at me very seriously and said, 'You must believe me when I tell you——' "

A door creaked. There was a shuffling sound in the corridor, and a faint voice called "Dorothy."

"Excuse me."

Dorothy hurried into the corridor.

Tommy looked about, inspecting the volumes in a bookcase which seemed to be locked permanently. He saw Stoddard's lectures, a faded cyclopedia of household facts, an incomplete set of Dickens, "Three Men in a Boat," the poems of Owen Meredith, "Battles of the War of the Rebellion," the poems of Adelaide Anne Procter——

Then he heard a whispered colloquy which gradually

rose in pitch. He could distinguish "it's getting late," "your father can't sleep," and "been here long enough." Presently Dorothy returned.

"I'm going," announced Tommy.

"Oh, you needn't," said Dorothy sweetly, but in a tone that carried no conviction and much relief.

"Getting late."

She found his hat.

"It's been most pleasant," remarked Tommy. "Don't give up your singing. Go right on. You'll make good."

"Do you really think so?"

"I really do. Just stick to it. Most of the girls nowadays begin something—and then they skip off and marry some well-fixed young man—and that's the end of it."

"I'm not thinking of anything like that."

"That speech is usually the sign of a secret engagement——"

Dorothy shook her head.

"Nothing could be further from my thoughts."

"That's good," said Tommy. "For your career, of course."

He meant to make his exit on this line. But he stopped.

"I'd like to see you again—soon," he said.

He might be useful, although he wasn't exactly attractive.

"Ring me up."

It was a tantalizing command. Dorothy thought it combined remoteness with an elusive cordiality.

He smiled. It wasn't as good a smile as Arnold's.

"Thank you."

"Good night, Mr. Borge."

"Er—they call me Tommy."

"May I?"

"Our Little Girl"

She liked the retort.

"I wouldn't like it if you didn't—Dorothy."

He was a little previous, but he'd call her Dorothy anyhow, eventually. She giggled.

He extended his hand. She took it. He held hers.

"And don't give up your singing."

She withdrew her hand.

"I won't."

A cough in the distance.

"Good night—Dorothy. I'll see you soon?"

"Ring me up. Good night."

Tommy encountered Arnold Deering on Broad Street two days later.

"So you've heard Dorothy sing," remarked Arnold.

Tommy nodded. He didn't like the proprietary air.

"Fine little girl," continued Arnold. "And she's got a great voice. What do you think of it?"

"Confidentially," said Tommy, "she's got a voice like conscience."

"What's that?" demanded Arnold.

"A still small voice," Tommy replied with a grin.

He had been saving up this definition for twenty-four hours.

Arnold shrugged his shoulders.

"Not so much of a gag," he said. "Ring me up some time. We'll have lunch."

He crossed the street to greet a young man who wore a hatband the same color as his.

IV

OF SMALL BEGINNINGS

Madame Schneider was one of those local teachers who would have announced "only a limited number of pupils accepted" had she advertised. She was a small, buxom creature, plain-featured, pince-nezed, and coiffured with little regard to aesthetic values. When she listened, she put her head forward. And when she spoke she put it still further forward. She was not impressive, but she had a manner which said: "Isn't it a pity you failed! If you had only come to me first, I could have shown you so simply!" This manner did little to stimulate prospective pupils, but it convinced many a parent that Madame Schneider would stand for no nonsense and that she could turn out singers as a meat chopper could turn out Salisbury steaks.

There was an overpowering simplicity about Madame Schneider's studio on upper Broadway. The Madame herself opened the door to a tiny reception-room, which contained a few chairs, a table with copies of last year's musical journals, and a collection of framed autographed pictures from various musical lights. Few of these photographs were inscribed specifically to Madame Schneider, but the gallery was imposing, nevertheless. The studio proper was a slightly larger room, containing a middle-aged piano, several music cabinets, two chairs, and more autographed pictures. Madame Schneider moved from one room to the other like a nurse gliding from a dentist's waiting-room to his office.

Mrs. Loamford arrived at Madame Schneider's studio

"Our Little Girl"

by appointment, bringing with her Dorothy and a roll of music. Madame Schneider permitted the callers to wait for a short interval before answering their ring, and led them into the anteroom.

Dorothy's first glimpse of Madame Schneider confirmed her preconceived judgment that Michel Soedlich would be the logical teacher. This woman looked hopelessly uninteresting. There had to be romance in an artist's background, and Madame Schneider was too much like a virtuous seamstress to be romantic.

"Wouldn't it be cozier," Madame Schneider said as soon as her visitors were seated, "if we went into the studio?"

She opened the sliding door between the rooms and waited for Mrs. Loamford and Dorothy to enter. She bowed them into the two chairs and sat on the piano stool.

"This, I take it, is your daughter," she began.

Dorothy repressed a squirming movement. Madame Schneider was trying to appear important. She spoke of Dorothy as she might speak of a small and undernourished baby. Soedlich might have regarded her at least as one who had something in common with him.

"I believe I talked to you about Dorothy over the phone the other day," said Mrs. Loamford. "I should be very glad to have you hear her voice."

"Have you ever had lessons, Miss Loamford?" inquired Madame Schneider.

"My daughter has not," answered Mrs. Loamford. "I believe that she has an unusual natural voice."

Madame Schneider waved amiably at Dorothy.

"And," Mrs. Loamford continued, "I have brought some of her music——"

"Permit me to test her voice," interrupted Madame Schneider.

Of Small Beginnings

She struck a few notes on the piano and asked Dorothy to sing them. Dorothy produced them in a quavering tone. She couldn't sing for a woman who looked and spoke like a nursery governess.

"Don't be nervous," advised her mother.

Madame Schneider admonished silence with a polite but imperious motion.

It was a temptation to sing as badly as possible in the hope of having Madame Schneider declare her impossible. Dorothy thought that to be taught by a pedantic little woman like this was no better than learning French verbs from Mlle. Jeanne, the weak sister of Miss Blagden's faculty.

"Try it again, my dear," said Madame Schneider.

There was a slight improvement, and other exercises followed. The final one was beyond Dorothy's powers.

"I'm afraid I can't do that," she confessed.

She didn't care, either.

"It's not very hard," said Madame Schneider. "Listen."

She played the sequence of notes on the piano, and rather surprised Dorothy and Mrs. Loamford by singing them in a clear, powerful soprano voice, taking the last top-note with ease.

"Some day you'll do that, Dorothy," commented Mrs. Loamford.

Dorothy smiled feebly. She disliked Madame Schneider's vocal efficiency as much as she disliked her manners.

"It's a matter of method—and practice," explained Madame Schneider.

"My daughter's voice is worth cultivating, isn't it?" said Mrs. Loamford. "Dorothy dear, please sit outside, while Madame Schneider and I discuss this matter."

"Our Little Girl"

The deprecating glances of Madame Schneider did not prevent Dorothy from obeying the behest.

Entering on a musical career evidently wasn't at all as she had pictured it. Soedlich, according to pictures in the musical magazines, had an interesting face and there were strange stories of the methods he had used to bring warmth to the voice of a prima donna who had been known as the "icicle." Now, Madame Schneider—

Going to Madame Schneider would be like going to Dr. Sill, the family dentist. It wouldn't hurt much and it might even be beneficial, but it would be wearying beyond words. And she would feel constrained before this prim little woman. What she needed was a teacher who would bring things out of her, who would make her sing almost unspeakably well. Madame Schneider would make the most passionate love lyric sound like one of Professor Abendschein's abominable exercises for developing the little finger.

Dorothy paced the room impatiently and finally looked out of the window. She could see a court and a fat woman cooking. Inspiration? Where? The fat woman cooking symbolized Madame Schneider and her studio. Oh-h!

The sliding door opened, and Madame Schneider ushered Mrs. Loamford into the anteroom.

"Dorothy, my dear," said Mrs. Loamford, "Madame Schneider has consented to take you as a pupil. She thinks very well of your voice."

Dorothy wished that Madame Schneider had rejected her—but Madame Schneider had not yet reached the stage where possible pupils were discouraged.

"Your lessons will start next week," continued Mrs. Loamford, "and at the start you will not have to practise very much."

Of Small Beginnings

"I'm sure Miss Dorothy and I will get along together perfectly," said Madame Schneider. "Don't you think so, dear?"

Dorothy vouchsafed that she thought so. So this was the beginning of a "career!"

"Meanwhile," added Madame Schneider, "there are certain things you must do. You must get plenty of rest. No late hours—but you are a sensible girl and you don't care about staying out late. No smoking—but you do not smoke, I am sure."

"Certainly not!"

Mrs. Loamford lost no time in confirming this flattering hypothesis.

"Avoid rich foods," Madame Schneider went on, "and keep regular habits. You will understand what that means, I am sure, or, if not, your mother will tell you. Above all, get plenty of fresh air and breathe deeply every morning on rising and every night on retiring. A good physique and good health are necessary to every successful singer and many a person whose voice has been nothing unusual has risen to the top by taking the best possible care of himself.

"At the end of six months, Mrs. Loamford, I want you to come here again with Miss Dorothy, and hear the difference in her singing. Before that time, I must ask her to sing only the exercises that I prescribe for her and under no circumstances to sing for friends or visitors. And I am sure that we shall get on swimmingly."

A dull summer for Dorothy followed. Arnold suddenly decided to make a motor trip through Canada. He invited Dorothy to accompany him, but he might as well have invited Helen of Troy. Mrs. Loamford might

"Our Little Girl"

not have objected to that. Nevertheless, the invitation impressed Mrs. Loamford with Arnold's generosity. Tommy Borge, after an inexplicable silence of several weeks, sent a highly literary letter from a little town in Connecticut, where, he announced, he would spend several months writing a play, of which no more was heard thereafter. The girls of Miss Blagden's School had long since scattered. There was little company in town. Mr. Loamford's activities at the office precluded a vacation until late in July. Except for the almost daily sessions with Madame Schneider, Dorothy had little to do. Lessons were to end temporarily when the Loamfords went to a little colony in Maine, where Dorothy was the only person between the ages of twelve and forty-three. In September Dorothy was to continue "in earnest," as her mother explained.

Madame Schneider was painstaking and she quoted many authorities, but her method struck Dorothy as singularly futile. There were breathing exercises without end, queer little tunes sung through the nose, tones produced in strange ways on different vowels—but music? There was no singing as such. When, in the privacy of her room, she tried to sing some of the songs she used to know, she could discover no change in the results and the old difficulties with low tones and high notes were still there.

It wasn't at all as she had imagined it. She had read of the early struggles of famous singers—Madame Schneider insisted that her pupils know something of the history of song—but in all of these there had been something exciting. There was nothing exciting about taking lessons from Madame Schneider and very little to show for it.

Wouldn't it be a good idea to leave home and to take

Of Small Beginnings

a little flat downtown, and—this was important—to work with a teacher who could make lessons something more than a series of calisthenics? That would be a thrilling adventure, and all great singers had had thrilling adventures. But how? Her checking account couldn't last very long, and then——

Well, next fall it would be different. There would be no starting "in earnest," with Madame Schneider. She would find some way of changing. What had Madame Schneider accomplished, anyhow?

Dorothy was discouraged when she went to Poole's Orchard, Maine. She was anxious to know what all these strange contortions with the breath and the chest muscles had to do with singing the surprisingly strong and bright tones which Madame Schneider produced now and then without any apparent effort. One Sunday morning she tried to let out her voice at the local Baptist Church. She desisted when she saw several worshipers turn to stare at her and shake their heads mournfully.

"Do you know, Dorothy?" said her mother, that afternoon. "I was surprised when I heard your voice in church this morning. It's such a beautiful voice—but——"

That "but" was, to Dorothy, a complete criticism of the methods of Madame Schneider. Her momentary mood of despair over her mother's discovery that there was something wrong with her singing gave way quickly as a brilliant idea presented itself. Here was an opportunity to get rid of Madame Schneider! Of course, it would take a careful approach to convince her mother, yet Soedlich was already appearing on the horizon.

"I don't think I'll ever make a singer," Dorothy sighed hypocritically.

Her mother stared at her in surprise.

"Our Little Girl"

"What nonsense, Dorothy!"

"I've taken lessons for several months, and my singing doesn't sound right. It's weak, it's——"

"Don't be absurd! How can you expect any results after just a few weeks' training? At the end of a year's good, steady work you'll have a right to consider results."

"Really, I don't think I'll ever get results—this way."

Mrs. Loamford looked at her sharply.

"What does that mean?"

"I'm afraid—I'm afraid I haven't enough faith in Madame Schneider."

Her mother glared at her as though she were ready to ignite her at the nearest convenient stake for this heresy.

"She's most capable. Let us have no more of this. Study hard—and you will see that I am right."

"But I can't work with a person who doesn't—who doesn't inspire me."

"That's a foolish idea. You young people seem to go in heavily for 'inspiration'—whatever that is. Hard work, Dorothy—that's all you need. Just do what Madame Schneider says."

"I haven't anything against Madame Schneider. It's just that she doesn't make me want to sing. Something that ought to be there—*isn't*."

Mrs. Loamford pushed aside her sewing to show that she would settle this debate instantly.

"This is all very foolish and very hysterical of you, Dorothy, and I'm surprised. You have a God-given voice and your father and I are doing everything possible to give you an opportunity to develop it. Before you were born I prayed to God that there might be music in my daughter's soul. God was very good to me. As a baby you showed your musical instincts. I am sorry now that I permitted you to drop your piano playing. At

Of Small Beginnings

school, the only subject in which you showed any aptitude was music. And now, because you aren't able to sing as well as a woman who has devoted her life to singing, you wish to give up your work with her—well, for what?"

Dorothy had no answer. She started to speak and found that there was nothing to say. Then she began to cry and ran from the room.

That evening her father approached her.

"What's this I hear about your wanting to stop lessons with Madame Schneider?" he demanded.

Dorothy was silent. Mr. Loamford never persisted long. She would let this episode spend itself.

"Your mother and I can't understand it at all," he went on. "She's exceptionally competent. You should consider yourself fortunate to have such a good teacher."

Dorothy continued silent.

"If you have anything to say," her father added, "I'll be glad to hear it. But I can't understand what whim has got this idea into your head."

Mrs. Loamford never had been able to keep aloof from a domestic altercation. She joined in.

"Isn't it absurd, Samuel," she demanded rhetorically, "how Dorothy has gotten this notion that Madame Schneider isn't good enough for her?"

Dorothy backed away. Her mother was about to speak again when she let out a loud scream.

"You can't make me take lessons!" she cried. "You can't do it! I don't like that woman! That's all! I don't want to sing anyhow! I'm doing it as a favor to you! I don't like that woman! I hate her! I hate singing! Oh God! Can't you let me alone?"

Dorothy, sobbing violently, ran upstairs to her room.

"Only hysteria," declared Mrs. Loamford.

Her husband started away.

"Our Little Girl"

"I came here for a rest," he said, "and I find this sort of thing on my hands. Why do you have to drag me into it?"

"Why, Samuel!"

"I don't know anything about this business. All I do is pay the bills. That should be enough for you. I came out here for peace and quiet and what do I get? This! I won't have anything more to do with it."

"But I only asked you to speak to her about it, to put some sense into her head——"

"Who put this whole thing into her head? You fix it up! You started it. I'm going out in the garden."

He left her. It was one of his victories.

Mrs. Loamford went to Dorothy's room. The door was locked. She rapped on it. No answer.

"Dorothy!"

Her commanding cry brought no response.

Silence—and a sound of sobbing from behind the door.

"Dorothy!"

The firmness of the order evoked nothing. She ran down the stairs to her husband.

"She's locked herself in. She won't answer. I don't know what she'll do. Go to her. See what she's doing."

Loamford looked up coolly from a small hill of potatoes which he was weeding casually.

"Huh?"

"She's locked herself in! She's crying! She won't answer!"

"Let her alone, then. It'll be all right in the morning. She'll get over it."

"But she won't answer!"

"I know it. Let her alone. Maybe it'll be good for her. Maybe she'll cry away some of that nonsense you've put in her head!"

Of Small Beginnings

With an exclamation of despair and disgust, Mrs. Loamford made her way back to Dorothy's room.

"Dorothy!"

Still no answer. She listened carefully at the keyhole. The sobbing had subsided. She could hear steady breathing. She wondered whether she ought to call her husband to open the door with his key. What use would it be with him in his present mood? She went down to the garden. It was dark, but the flash of a pocket lamp showed her that Loamford was still amusing himself with the potatoes. He enjoyed farming at night. As she approached him he turned the lamp on her.

"Everything all right now?"

He was puffing at a cigar.

She gave up the battle.

"I think so. I'm tired."

"Good. Go to bed. I'll spray a few plants tonight. Looks like they might need it."

"But you must speak to Dorothy in the morning."

"Wait till morning."

Up in the little room which had been allotted to Dorothy, the perturbed Miss Loamford was sitting on her bed, staring at a bowl of matches on the chiffonier. The matches suggested the gas jet and the gas jet suggested something grimly fascinating. Her parents certainly would be sorry if they rapped at the door the next morning and found their daughter lying lifeless but beautiful in death. She walked about restlessly. And it certainly would serve them right! They had no consideration for her.

She leaned against the chiffonier and looked out of the window. She could see a few stars but no moon, and shadowy treetops. She had seen this view every night. How dull it was! How dull everything was! Why

"Our Little Girl"

did her parents have to bring her to such a dull place?

Life wasn't worth living here. She might as well be dead. It would be the end of a promising life cheated of——

She sat in the rickety rocking-chair near the window and wondered about the promising life. It hadn't been very exciting. When she was small she had somehow passed through school year after year. Then she had gone to Miss Blagden's School and had passed through year after year. For a moment it seemed as though she might some day escape from passing through things year after year by becoming a great singer. But at the end of this rainbow lay—Madame Schneider. And now—more Madame Schneider!

It was all so hopeless. What had she to live for? Well—there was Arnold. Yes, she might live for Arnold. But she didn't feel the right sort of love for Arnold or for any man. Oh, what might have been if her parents had given her opportunities, if they had introduced her to the right men, if they had permitted that freedom which some of the girls she knew enjoyed! Perhaps it would help to say a prayer to the moon. Perhaps she could work up a spell about the name of Arnold. But again, there was no moon and the stars didn't inspire her.

She was friendless. Friendless and alone. Why had she never had any girl friends? But the girls in her set never had close friends. Among girls, that is. And Dorothy hadn't even a real friend among men, unless it was Arnold. Well, yes—Tommy Borge had shown interest, but he—she could never grow excited about Tommy Borge. She just couldn't; that was all there was to that.

Now, Arnold. She walked about again, as though by

Of Small Beginnings

marching to bring before her an enthralling view of Arnold. He was attractive. He was clever—in a way. He was a gentleman. He danced beautifully. She tried to recall how he had held her in his arms at the graduation dance. There had been a waltz, a terribly melting waltz, and Arnold——

She stretched herself out on the bed. The vocalizes of Madame Schneider had faded. A waltz was murmuring to her. Yet there was something missing. If Arnold only had said——

The phantom waltz had become her lullaby.

And, as such things happen, the matter settled itself suddenly in the morning. The Loamford family had nothing to do with it. Madame Schneider settled it with a letter which contained a clipping, showing Edna Eldridge, a new soprano of the Metropolitan Opera House, arrayed in a fetching short-skirted costume as "Nedda" in "I Pagliacci."

"Dear Madam," ran the letter. "The enclosed clipping will no doubt surprise you, but I have become a member of the Metropolitan Opera Company and will make my *début* this season as you will see from enclosed clipping.

"This will make it impossible for me to continue lessons for your daughter Dorothy, and am enclosing bill to date, which please remit at your convenience. With best wishes to Miss Dorothy and thanking you in advance, yours truly, Edna Eldridge (Mme. Schneider)."

Mrs. Loamford passed the letter to her husband without a word. He looked at it with a smile.

"I'm sorry I never saw her," he remarked, "she's rather—shapely."

"Samuel!" objected Mrs. Loamford.

"Well—she has nice legs," he continued. "A good duet."

“Our Little Girl”

Here Dorothy came to breakfast, red-eyed.

“Cheer up, Dorothy,” cried Loamford. “Your Madame Schneider leads a double life. I won’t let you take lessons from her any more.”

He threw the letter and clippings to Dorothy.

Dorothy read both and smiled.

“Who’d ever think——”

And then she kissed her mother.

“Fine, fine,” commented Loamford. “Thank Heaven, that’s over. Can’t see, though, why you shouldn’t find something inspiring in such an attractive woman.”

He anticipated his wife’s remark.

“Don’t get jealous, mother. You’re not so bad yourself!”

It was one of his jolly mornings.

“I’m so thankful!”

Dorothy’s half-smothered remark brought inquiring looks from her parents. But she only kissed them and busied herself with breakfast.

If Dorothy had known to whom to be thankful, she would have made a pilgrimage to the shrines of a certain tailor and a certain hair-dresser, one of whom had converted Edna Schneider (whose Madame was hers by courtesy only) into an alluring little body, and the other of whom had swung a mass of unconsidered hair into a design which attracted every eye. Or perhaps she should have sent a letter of thanks to a young actor who had thrown an ironic suggestion about names and make-up to an insignificant vocal teacher—and who had been taken seriously,

V

INCLUDING WHAT LITTLE GIRLS ARE MADE OF

The metamorphosis of the spinsterly Madame Schneider into the fetching Edna Eldridge restored tranquillity to the fluttered bosom of the family Loamford. Dorothy acquired a canoe and became an expert solo paddler, not so much from love of this diversion as from the lack of any romantic assistance in her athletic ventures. Mr. Loamford continued to weed his potatoes and to comment flatteringly on the radishes which came from his garden. His wife continued to patronize the itinerant farmers, and there was no complaint about the vegetables served at the Loamford table.

Music, for a space, had lost its charms. The infrequent visitors to Poole's Orchard learned that Dorothy was said to have an unusually beautiful natural voice but that she had not studied long enough to sing in public. No; not even for a few friends. Why, her own mother and father hadn't heard her sing for months. In a year or so—ah, that would be different.

Madame Schneider's successor was not discussed. Now and then Mrs. Loamford would suggest that it might be worth while to consider the question. She had heard good things of a Mrs. Woodworth, who had been a famous church contralto in her time. Then there was Miss Rachauser, who announced herself the sole teacher of a young tenor who recently had caused an uproar at an open-air concert in New York. Mr. Loamford pro-

"Our Little Girl"

tested that it was too hot to think of such matters. Dorothy was content to let the matter rest.

Some graduate student, eager to achieve a reputation in the abstruse, might build his thesis on the proposition that the non-delivery of advertising matter sent through the mails is a factor in American life. He might take as his starting point the possible developments in Dorothy's career had not the letter carrier dutifully brought to the Loamford home the brochure of the St. Cecilia Conservatory of Music (A Home Music School for Girls). The St. Cecilia Conservatory was in the heart of the city, the circular acknowledged, thus permitting access to the opera, concerts, recitals, lectures, etc., and yet conducted by women who knew that a good home was essential to the girl who was studying for a career. It combined, in fact, the cozy atmosphere of the small-town college with the broad cultural advantages of the metropolis. Students who lived in New York City might sleep at home, for a limited number of day students of unusual promise would be accepted.

Mrs. Loamford liked the circular.

"This is the place for Dorothy!" she proclaimed. "It means business."

Her husband agreed that it sounded plausible and that the rates were reasonable enough, considering that instruction in repertoire (whatever that may have been), fencing and rhythmic and free lectures on musical appreciation were included in the fee. The list of instructors contained several famous names, among them Michel Soedlich, who was listed as a "guest coach."

The booklet and its entry into the family life of the Loamfords was a triumph for the anonymous copy writer who had created it. Dorothy thought that the St. Cecilia Conservatory would be the best possible place for her.

Including What Little Girls Are Made Of

(Because Soedlich was in the list of instructors.)

Her mother thought that the St. Cecilia Conservatory would be the best possible place.

(The only conceivable objection being the presence of Soedlich.)

Her father thought that it would be as good a place as any.

For all the fanfares on the theme that only pupils of the uttermost promise would be considered for admission to St. Cecilia, the entrance examination inflicted on Dorothy proved to be simple. A few scales—and the benignant lady at the piano announced that Dorothy had been accepted.

"Of course, my dear," she said, "you have a great deal to learn. You have a fine soprano voice, although it has been injured by faulty use. But never mind—we'll correct that. A few years' study, and you ought to be a very good concert artist. Many girls who have come to us with considerably less natural talent have developed into very fine artists. Those who have not gone directly on the concert stage have been able to give great pleasure to their friends in the home. And, my dear, there is much to be said for music in the home!"

Dorothy then learned that a small deposit would entitle her to tickets at cost for every important concert or operatic performance. Any balance remaining at the end of the term would be credited to her account.

"Nothing is more important," said the handmaiden of St. Cecilia, "than hearing as much good music as possible. You will not have many evenings to spend socially, my dear, but you will not regret that. We have dances here now and then, which the students of St. Michael's Conservatory attend. They are so jolly! And before the dances, the St. Michael's Male Choir always gives us a

"Our Little Girl"

recital. Last year they sang a program of motets by Palestrina and Bach. My dear, it was most interesting!"

Mrs. Loamford nodded enthusiastically.

"This sounds most encouraging," she remarked. "Girls today spend too much time in gadding about. Dorothy is a sensible girl, but there's no use letting her have nothing to do with her time. I suppose the girls go to concerts in a body?"

"Oh, indeed yes! And one of our teachers always goes with them. We may be a little old-fashioned, but we do not think it right for girls to go about unchaperoned—even among themselves—at night in a public place."

An office attendant spread before Dorothy and Mrs. Loamford a pile of blank forms on which were to be indicated the prospective student's experience, age, place of birth, father's business or profession, birthplace of parents, education, foreign languages spoken or read fluently, and religious preferences.

"You will understand," explained the official, "why we must have this last space on our cards. It's merely a precaution—although with you, Mrs. Loamford, it's a mere formality."

In the weeks preceding the official opening of St. Cecilia's, Dorothy noted a change in her mother's attitude toward her. She had observed something unusual for the first time when, on a shopping expedition, Mrs. Loamford had hurried her ostentatiously by a store-window in which there was a placard announcing reductions in maternity dresses. When Dorothy sat beside a prospective mother in a street-car, Mrs. Loamford became nervous and suggested that they walk home—it would do them both good—and when Dorothy demurred, she left the car anyhow and took a taxi. There always seemed to be something left unsaid in her mother's con-

Including What Little Girls Are Made Of

versations with her nowadays. Mrs. Loamford, normally the most voluble of women, was dropping into the habit of saying, "and, Dorothy——" without completing the sentence.

Dorothy thought at first that her mother had discovered Arnold's picture stowed away in the desk and that she was on the verge of asking whether her little girl had anything to tell her. But a casual allusion to Arnold brought no noteworthy response. It wasn't Arnold, then, who was on her mother's mind. It wasn't until late one afternoon, when Dorothy was reading the proceedings of a divorce case in a newspaper, that Mrs. Loamford unburdened herself.

"I must talk to you, Dorothy," she said agitatedly.

She pulled herself out of the sitting-room easy chair, and locked the doors cautiously. What was it that the servants couldn't hear? Generally, Mrs. Loamford seemed to be willing that all who were within a powerful earshot should ascertain her opinions on all subjects.

Mrs. Loamford closed her knitting bag auspiciously, and turned to Dorothy.

"Sit close to me, Dorothy," she said.

Dorothy moved to a small chair beside her mother's. This was nothing if not the prelude to something thrilling.

"Dorothy," said her mother, in the lowest voice that ever Dorothy had heard, "I feel that I would not be doing my duty as a mother to you if I did not tell you certain things which—which ought to be a part of—which every girl in your position should know."

It was a horrible disappointment. Dorothy suspected what would follow. Her mother would tell her "the facts of life." Poor mother! So this was what had worried her—and Dorothy had known "the facts of life" for years! It was the favorite topic of conversation

"Our Little Girl"

at the teas which the girls used to give. Like as not, she could tell her mother a few things!

"There are certain subjects which are discussed all too freely nowadays," Mrs. Loamford continued, "—things which a mother ought to tell her daughter rather than let her get wrong information from her friends. Perhaps you don't know it, Dorothy, but I've been making a study of these matters lately just so that I could tell you about them as a mother should."

"I know about—those things," Dorothy volunteered.

Her mother looked horrified.

"What! Idle talk and stories—that's all," she commented severely.

She had prepared herself for this occasion, and she would deliver herself, even though Dorothy were as well informed as Dr. Freud.

"When you were a very little girl," she continued sternly, "I told you about yourself—you remmeber that?"

Dorothy remembered the event. Her mother had come home from a parents' meeting and talked endlessly about the digestive system, the brain, the heart, the lungs and what she had called "the more intimate details."

"You know of course," Mrs. Loamford went on, warming up to her subject, "that the male body is not exactly like yours. You remember how I used to explain to you in the country how the flowers reproduced. How the pollen was carried and all that. I think that you should know, now that you are going out in the world, how human life is created."

How simple did her mother think she was?

"I know, mother," said Dorothy. "We had lectures on sex hygiene in biology class."

Mrs. Loamford blushed at the word "sex." Young girls didn't care what they said nowadays!

Including What Little Girls Are Made Of

"How could they do that?" she demanded. "You never told me anything about it before. I don't believe in such things. I'm surprised to hear Miss Blagden tolerated them."

Her indignation, however, didn't destroy the continuity of her discourse.

"Every woman, after she has reached a certain period of life, begins——"

It wasn't what she wanted to say.

"Every woman has in her the seeds of a new life. Before she is married these seeds are—just seeds. After her marriage, they are brought to blossom and to bear fruit by her husband's love. Just as the pollen produces the flower so does the man's love."

Mrs. Loamford was forgetting her text.

"What I mean is that children are the result of love between man and woman."

She paused a moment.

"I don't have to tell you why you should keep your body strong, clean and pure for the man who will be the father of your children—and let us hope that your union will be blessed with children. I know that you are a fine girl morally and that you will develop into a fine woman. Still, a mother must tell her daughter these things.

"At the same time, there are many smaller bad habits which are in their way just as bad as some of the worse offences. Never allow any young man to put his arm about you. Even though he goes no further, you will lower yourself in his eyes if you let him do it. The minute a girl lets young men get intimate with her she loses something that no young girl should lose. Many girls today think nothing of holding hands with any young man they meet. Some of them think it's necessary to indulge in such things to be popular. Dorothy, I would

"Our Little Girl"

rather be unpopular than find friends in any such way!

"As for kissing—Dorothy, a kiss should be a sacred thing. It is symbolic of——"

Mrs. Loamford blushed again.

All of this was old stuff for Dorothy. She resented the ancient, kindergarten tone which her mother was using. As far as "the facts of life" were concerned, she was certain that she could shock her mother without any effort. As for this talk about holding hands and kissing—that was old-fashioned. Dorothy didn't make a practice of holding hands, not because the contact was immoral, but because it was more effective to hold young men at a distance. The more they wanted you, the nicer it was. Kissing also was taboo. It didn't mean anything, but it gave the kisser a psychological advantage. Anyhow, it wasn't right to encourage a young man too much.

The authorities whom Mrs. Loamford had consulted, however, probably were not aware of Dorothy's code.

"A kiss," resumed Mrs. Loamford, recovering from her embarrassment, "means—it means physical love, Dorothy. So many young girls don't understand that. They play with the most sacred things in life. One of the things I like about your friend, Arnold Deering——"

Now she was beginning to interest Dorothy. Had her mother noticed something? Was all this sexology only an introduction to the real topic?

"—is that he doesn't—he's always a gentleman. I don't mean that some of your friends don't behave well, but Arnold is particularly nice that way."

He was, too. One of the girls had said he was "too virginal to be exciting," but Dorothy rather liked to think that Arnold wasn't somebody else's cast-off. Even so, he would kiss, if he were prompted. Her mother didn't know much about men!

Including What Little Girls Are Made Of

Mrs. Loamford rose and looked out into the street. She twisted the cord of the window shade.

"Perhaps you wonder why I've told you all these things," she said finally. "Only because I wouldn't be doing my duty as a mother if I didn't tell you everything you ought to know. So many mothers neglect their duty to their children that way. They don't tell them these things. They aren't frank about marriage and what it means. That's why there are so many unhappy marriages. Girls get married and then——"

"Well, it's no wonder there's so much unhappiness in the younger generation. That poor little McBride girl! You read about her in the paper, didn't you? She was just swept off her feet by a good-looking young fellow. She married him—and then——"

Mrs. Loamford came close to Dorothy and looked about cautiously.

"The poor little girl didn't know—that was all. That's why I've told you all these things. When I was a girl, my mother wouldn't have dreamed of telling me such things or even mentioning them to me."

Mrs. Loamford opened the doors.

"That's all," she concluded. "I don't think you need to know more than that—now. But you're going to be faced with temptations in your work and I thought you ought to know—these things."

Dorothy thanked her mother and went to her room. She rummaged among a pile of dusty books hidden in the back of the clothes closet. Finally she discovered the volume for which she had been searching. She opened it at the preface and smiled.

"Authorities differ," the preface began, "as to the age at which direct sex instruction should be given to young girls. All agree, however, that the girl's mother, if living,

"Our Little Girl"

is the person best qualified to impart the facts of life to her daughter.

"The following chapters are intended as guides for the use of parents in imparting to their children the facts of sex in a clean, wholesome way. Physical details should not be introduced too abruptly. It is best to begin with references to flowers. . . ."

Dorothy wondered what her mother would say had she known of the presence of this book in Dorothy's room. She observed that her mother had somewhat distorted the order of events as prescribed in the work and had laid undue stress on kissing. She shoved the book back at the bottom of the pile. There was no danger of detection, for the work was enclosed in brown paper, and on it was written in a youthful feminine hand "Geography." Dorothy reflected that she had never returned this book to the girl from whom she had borrowed it. Not that it mattered. That girl had long since eloped with an assistant movie director. She would hardly need the book. Anyhow, the book had some historic value, for there had been a great ado about the elopement.

Arnold Deering, having been informed of Dorothy's enrollment at St. Cecilia, proposed a little farewell party before Dorothy "entered conventry," which was one of his little jests, he explained. They would go to the theatre, then to the Battle Royale, a new dance club instituted by an entrepreneur who had learned something from the success of after-theatre meeting places similarly named, at which the entertainment was furnished by colored performers. Dorothy had been at the Plaza, the Biltmore, the Ritz and the various institutions distinguished by French names and not-so-French habitués, but the "Battle Royale" was something new, ostensibly exclusive, not for the proletariat. It was whispered—but not too softly—

Including What Little Girls Are Made Of

that pretty fast parties took place in this caravansary and that the terpsichorean exertions of the talent waxed revelatory after midnight. As no one had been arrested for improper expositions of muscular facility, the place had yet to draw a college following.

The play was a harmless affair, adapted from the Russian and therefore considered profoundly entertaining. Dorothy found little amusing in it, although Arnold insisted that there was a searing irony back of it. Who was seared, he did not explain. But the final scene, in which an old man, deserted by his family, cheated by his supposed friends and impoverished by his faith in mankind, declared that never had he been so happy, was, Arnold set forth, a master stroke. Dorothy thanked him for a good time.

The Battle Royale was in the Fifties, near Broadway. A huge green and red sign of flickering lights almost obscured the little doorway which led into the building. There was a wide, shallow lobby, attended by negroes in Hawaiian costumes—Hawaiian in the best Broadway tradition. The headwaiter was not a negro. Something had to be done to keep the Southern trade.

It was almost midnight when Dorothy and Arnold entered the dining-room, which had a little space cleared in the centre for dancing. A balcony contained a negro jazz band. The tables were crowded closely upon each other, and the twenty-odd dancing couples had little room for their gyrations; not that they needed it for their school of dancing.

Arnold ordered ices and sandwiches and seemed impervious to the waiter's suggestion that something stronger than coffee might be had if the gentleman so desired.

"You can't tell what kind of stuff they have here," he told Dorothy. "And anyhow, I don't drink—only once in

"Our Little Girl"

a while, that is—at family celebrations or weddings or something where it wouldn't be polite not to. I don't like the stuff though, so what's the use of forming a habit that can't do you much good? I'm against Prohibition, but it really hasn't made any difference to me, except that I'm offered more drinks in a day now than I used to get in a year."

He looked about the floor. "Let's dance."

She noticed that Arnold didn't clutch at her as tightly as the other young men on the floor clung to their partners. He didn't even try to interlock fingers. A couple, dancing in such proximity that they might easily have been mistaken for the Siamese twins, collided with them.

"Pretty rough," Arnold remarked. "And rougher than pretty."

He almost stopped dancing after making this observation. Dorothy took the cue and laughed. Arnold resumed his evolutions happily.

Arnold's dancing was lovely. He moved along springily and he felt comfortable. There was nothing too professional in his efforts. Possibly he gangled a trifle. She remembered a malicious comment from Tommy Borge: "Arnold talks like a dancer and dances like a conversationalist." Tommy wasn't usually mean. She wondered again what he could have against Arnold. On the other hand, Arnold plainly thought that Tommy was *déclassé*. Might this account for Tommy's apophthegm that Arnold didn't hob-nob; he hob-snobbed? Arnold had mentioned once that Tommy wasn't light on his feet or anybody else's. They seemed to be pretty good friends, too.

She considered all of these matters as Arnold rattled on amiably of stocks and bonds and who was being married and how he had eluded a light heavyweight fortune-hunter (female) at a recent party.

Including What Little Girls Are Made Of

"How long will it be before you can make your *début*?" inquired Arnold, as they finished dancing. "That's a nice tune they're playing. Sounds like Irving Berlin."

"Three years at least. That isn't very long to study. Of course, I'll keep on studying after I begin to sing in public."

"More likely you'll get married before you're half-way through studying."

"Not at all! I'm going to stick to my work."

"Until the right man——"

"That's silly, Arnold! I'm serious about it."

"Oh, they always are."

"I really mean it."

"We'll see. Bet you a—what do you want?—bet you anything against a pair of socks that you'll never go through with it."

Dorothy laughed.

"That would be an easy way to get a grand piano. No, Arnold; I'm going through with it. When I start studying I'll see very few people and I'll spend most of my time at the opera and concerts."

She could deliver this with the experience born of practice.

"I like opera. Don't you think *Madama Butterfly*'s great? Wonderful tunes. It's funny somebody hasn't used some of them for fox-trots."

"You're always thinking of dance music, aren't you?"

"Not always. The music's wonderful here, though. Want to dance this one?"

They were on the floor again. The lights were dimmed and the orchestra was moaning out a Russian classic with the barest indication of dance time from a subdued banjo.

"I could dance here forever!" Arnold announced. "The floor's wonderful—and the music——"

"Our Little Girl"

The Siamese twins lurched into them again. Arnold whirled Dorothy out of the way, and the Siamese stumbled, knocking over one of the little tables near the edge of the dancing space.

"Tight," murmured Arnold.

Waiters appeared suddenly from all sides to resurrect the table. The headwaiter approached the scene of the catastrophe sternly. He was accompanied by a heavy, tired-looking functionary.

"That's been going on all evening," whispered the headwaiter. "Want to——"

The heavy man looked at the Siamese. He bowed suddenly, and smiled. The male Siamese smiled back. The heavy man motioned the headwaiter to accompany him.

"Thought they'd put them out," remarked Arnold. "Probably somebody important."

"The headwaiter just signaled to the band," observed Dorothy.

The band slowed up in its music and the tune died out. There was no response to the handclapping of the dancers. The lights shifted to a dull orange.

"Starting the show early," noted Arnold.

The show proved to be a replica of several vaudeville acts which had been playing about New York. For an hour, negroes shouted out ballads about Dixie and mammies and bandanas and down South. Dancers indulged in cake-walks. A particularly agile young negro performed a skating dance and followed it up with an impersonation of a Russian ballet principal. A large man in a checked suit demanded where Adam went when Eve was cutting the leaves, and a choir of dusky Adams and Eves danced behind him. They repeated the song endlessly.

Including What Little Girls Are Made Of

Then the lights went out. There was a barbaric scraping in the orchestra. A single spotlight from the ceiling flashed to the dance floor, where a pale negress stood dressed in a long piece of silk. In a strident voice she sang an unintelligible lyric which seemed to include the words "do that dance." Then the lights changed to a garish red. The orchestra shrieked loudly.

The negress started to dance. First she moved only her head. Then her shoulders. Then her hips. And suddenly her whole body quivered to the music. Moving slowly, but never stopping her quivering, she danced from one table to the next, stopping only long enough to perform a rhythmic paroxysm before one of the men at the table. The spotlight followed her about the room. Several diners reached forward as though to embrace her as she shivered before them, but she smiled and flung herself out of their reach. Gradually she came to Arnold's table. She stopped and wriggled her bare shoulders sinuously, whirling all the time. With each revolution her garment of silk unwound to the accompaniment of the trap-drum.

Dorothy moved her chair back to be out of the glare of the spotlight. Arnold sat still, with his hands on the table. The negress bent over the table, picked up Arnold's half-burnt cigarette from a match-stand, placed it between her lips, whirled about once more, and leaped abruptly to the dance floor, leaving her silk shimmering behind her. She bent backward, touched her hands to the floor, and suddenly performed a "split." There was a loud crash from the cymbal at this feat, and the room burst into applause. The lights went out, and the applause continued. The spotlight, narrowed to a mere edge of silver, flashed on the floor again, and the negress bowed, holding in front of her glistening skin the silk

"Our Little Girl"

cloth. The spotlight went out again. The applause continued. The orchestra started playing a fox-trot. The room was lit brilliantly. The negress was gone. A couple started dancing. The entertainment was over.

Dorothy looked up at Arnold.

"It must be late," she said.

She was beginning to feel a little uncomfortable. What would happen at the two A. M. show?

Arnold understood.

"All right."

He summoned the waiter and paid the check.

As he made his way out of the room with Dorothy the male Siamese approached him and slapped him heartily on the back.

"Hot dog, brother!" he cried. "You sure let that li'l black girl slip. Say, brother, if she shook that way in front of me—say, brother—that sure was some shaking—if it was me, brother——"

Arnold hurried to the cloakroom.

In the taxicab he said nothing. His hand sought Dorothy's.

"Thank you so much!" she said.

Arnold put his arm about her. She swung free.

"Don't, Arnold," she said softly. "I don't like it."

"It's nothing," he urged.

"I don't like it," she repeated mildly.

He dropped his arm.

"Oh, well——"

"Thank you so much, Arnold," she said; "it's just that——"

"Somebody else?" inquired Arnold.

"Nonsense," she laughed. "We can be just as good friends without that, can't we?"

Arnold kissed her hand.

Including What Little Girls Are Made Of

"That's enough," she said.

"It's all right, Dot," he murmured. "You look very sweet tonight."

They said nothing as the cab swung up Broadway, across Fifty-ninth Street. She was amused at the thought of her mother's probable reactions to an account of Arnold's advances. Not that Dorothy would tell her!

"That was an awfully exciting evening," commented Dorothy at length.

"Nothing excites you," remarked Arnold almost snapshily.

"I was thrilled."

"Really?"

He tried to take her hand again, but she withdrew it firmly.

The cab stopped at Dorothy's door. Arnold paid the driver, and escorted Dorothy up the steps.

"You've still got my key?" she asked.

He opened the door and hesitated.

"I'm sorry I can't ask you in," she said, extending her hand. "It's a little late."

"Yes, and I've got to be downtown early tomorrow—or today."

"Thank you so much! It was a wonderful evening!" Arnold smiled.

"When will I see you again?" he asked.

"Oh—ring me up."

She moved inside the door and switched on the light.

"Good night, Arnold. Thank you so much——"

"S'long, Dot."

She wondered what had prompted Arnold suddenly to wax amorous in the cab. Could it have been the effect of the negress' writhings? Hadn't Tommy once said that Arnold was saving his kisses for the girl he was going

"Our Little Girl"

to marry? He certainly had come close enough to kissing her tonight! After all the trouble he'd taken, she might have let him—but she wasn't that kind of girl! Of course, she had heard that post-midnight taxis carry perquisites. Tommy had said that so many of them were orange because they couldn't blush red any longer for their occupants. "Ask Arnold," he had said. Would Tommy have behaved differently?

Still, come to think of it, it was a nice experience, this evening. It was nice to be out with Arnold. He danced well; he looked well; he was easily the most gentlemanly-looking man at the Battle Royale that night; he was generous; he was clever; people liked him; he liked her; he was a sweet boy——

And there Dorothy almost fell asleep with her evening dress only half unsnapped,

VI

GRADUS AD PARNASSUM

The glamorous nights with Arnold, the semi-professional evenings with Tommy and the occasional dancing jaunts with Benny Wallace, Howard Richardson, Sylvester Lee and other spasmodic visitors gradually dwindled into mere incidents, as St. Cecilia took possession of Dorothy. The prophecy that there would be little time for social diversion proved to be hopelessly accurate. From the time that a distinguished European pianist made the opening address in October to the evening that a distinguished European violinist made the graduating speech in June two years later, Dorothy was occupied with a continuous sequence of vocal lessons, "secondary piano" instruction, lectures on why Jenny Lind was a great artist, how Beethoven enlarged the scope of the symphony, the development of the present piano, Wagner and the leit-motif, diseases of the larynx, and Richard Strauss' demands on the virtuosity of piccolo players.

Dorothy's chief instructor was Elma Graaberg, an elderly Dutch woman, who, according to the catalogue of St. Cecilia, had been leading mezzo-soprano at many famous Continental opera houses. She was a tall, heavy woman, with impenetrable dark brown eyes, a hooked nose, a receding chin, and a disarray of reddish gray hair. Dorothy wondered at first whether the irregularity of the color was due to the use of a peruke or whether Mme. Graaberg was an inept manipulator of dye-stuffs.

"Our Little Girl"

She decided finally that the one-time opera singer was no chemist.

Contrary to all tradition, Mme. Graaberg had high praise for the instruction of Mme. Schneider-Miss Eldridge.

"You have been taught to breathe, my child," she would say in her rather meticulous English, of which only the intonation betrayed a foreign origin. "Somebody has taught you how to support your tone. You lucky girl!"

Mme. Graaberg's texts for vocal sermons seemed to be derived chiefly from the life of her late husband, an obscure tenor, who so far as Dorothy could learn, had never achieved success because of his capacity for conviviality and his incapacity for singing upper tones.

"Diction! diction!" she would cry out, as Dorothy bent all of her energies on producing a smooth tone. "Ah, my child, diction is very important. My poor Paul——"

"When his voice was almost gone—but you should have heard it when he was young—but they never gave him a chance in the big opera—when his voice was almost gone, he sang with me in Amsterdam. Manrico he sang. Think of that? Such a hard *tenore robusto* part and his voice is nothing, only a shadow. Here and there a note like in the old days, but that is all. And so many big arias and duets with so many hard high notes!

"He could not really sing any more, the other men used to say. These young fellows with their bull throats! They would laugh when he took his high C falsetto because he could not sing it full voice. Ah, but once he could sing it to shake the chandeliers! They would laugh when he sang that big aria because he could not shout out big tones. But my Paul was an artist.

"And that night, when he came to that cruel aria with its high C, I could see the young tenors standing in the

back of the house, ready to laugh at the poor old man. A funny weak Troubadour, they said. But my Paul was an artist. When he sang that aria every word was so clear that the last student in the gallery could hear it. They listened when he sang it. He sang with more than a voice. He sang with his soul. He could not sing a big high C—no—but he could sing with his heart. He moved them, my child! He moved them! And when he finished, the applause—oh, you never heard anything like it!

“And why? Because his beautiful diction was so fine. Because they knew that my poor Paul was singing. . . . Now let us try it again.”

Under the maternal methods of Mme. Graaberg, Dorothy could feel herself developing. Her first appearance at one of the Friday afternoon students' recitals was no ordeal, for all of the stories that she had heard of girls collapsing from nervousness on these occasions. In the back row of the little auditorium she could see Mme. Graaberg smiling at her. She sang for Mme. Graaberg. And the shaking of pedagogic heads in the vicinity of her preceptress told her that she had made an impression.

“They liked you, my child!” cried Mme. Graaberg after the recital.

“Did they say much?” inquired Dorothy.

“They were much pleased with your intelligence, your poise and your diction,” said Mme. Graaberg. “They liked your interpretation. We have not worked together for nothing, eh?”

She squeezed Dorothy's hand affectionately.

“And how calm you were! If you are always so at ease, it will be wonderful. My poor Paul was always so nervous. Even near the end, when he had been singing twenty years, he was so frightened. I would have to sit with him in his dressing-room and hold his hand for

“Our Little Girl”

half an hour before he appeared. But once he was on the stage—then it was different. He lost himself in the music.”

“Did they say anything about my voice?” asked Dorothy.

“A good voice, yes.”

Dorothy was dismayed.

“But if they weren’t impressed with my voice——”

Mme. Graaberg waved her hand grandly.

“It’s a fine voice—do not worry about that. Many a big singer might envy you such freshness of tone and your beautiful diction. It is there your strength lies. Such a lovely diction!”

Dorothy soon discovered that her achievements at the concert had not gone unnoticed by her fellow pupils. Rose Manning, a slim little girl, whose bright brown eyes and deep red hair made her the centre of attraction at the visits of the St. Michael choristers, approached her one afternoon in the library, bearing compliments. Dorothy had always mistrusted Rose. She was a little precocious. Her attainments as a coloratura soprano had been nothing remarkable, but it was said that no male instructor ever criticized her singing adversely. Rose was always rumored engaged—although she denied indignantly the charge direct. The report was that Rose had been breaking hearts since she was fifteen—and sometimes she didn’t look much more than that, even now. There were two opinions of Rose: one, that she “sang with her hair”: two, that beneath her artless ways there was something very lovely, if you could find it. Rose’s contemporaries were inclined to accept the first dictum.

“Madame Graaberg certainly taught *you* something!” cooed Rose.

Was there mockery back of this? Dorothy nodded at

the girl, who was balancing herself on her heels, and swinging to and fro. Rose often assumed this position, and it seemed to carry an indication of insincerity with it, Dorothy thought.

"I could get every word you sang," continued Rose. "You certainly made them talk about you."

It would be ungracious not to acknowledge this tribute.

"You do pretty well yourself," remarked Dorothy.

"Are you going into opera when you get out?"

"Opera? Me?"

A derisive chortle followed.

"I'm not kidding myself. I'll be in Mr. Ziegfeld's opera—if anything."

"You'll be in real opera!"

Dorothy could see Rose as Lucia, perhaps. She would be effective in the mad scene, with her hair down. In concert, Rose would be rather funny.

"Maybe."

It was a peculiar answer.

Dorothy looked sharply at Rose, who was performing a mild gymnastic exercise on the edge of a table. There was a suspicious-looking ring on the fourth finger of her left hand. Rose evidently recognized Dorothy's glance.

"Don't get too excited about that."

Which probably meant that she really was engaged.

"Aren't you——"

"Ooh——"

It was a cool little sound.

"Men don't interest me," Rose remarked, placing her elbows behind her on the table and lifting herself. "I can't be annoyed about them. I only love one man."

The girl was talking nonsense.

"I'm terribly interested in poor Paul. 'His voice was gone, my child, but his diction——'"

"Our Little Girl"

Rose mimicked Mme. Graaberg with irreverent accuracy.

"You've got a wicked diction," she added suddenly. "Each word a pearl, each pearl a prayer. You'll be in recital quick after they let you out."

Rose swung up on the table, and perched there, swinging her attractive legs.

Dorothy shook her head. She couldn't talk to Rose.

"You'll be down at Aeolian—see if you aren't! Miss Dorothy Reitz Loamford—soprano—tickets fifty cents to two dollars, tax ten per cent extra. Free list positively suspended. I know!"

"And you'll be—singing 'Lucia.'"

Dorothy hoped that there was no sarcasm in her voice, but if there was Rose overlooked it. She laughed.

"That's quaint, old dear. More likely Reisenweber's or such. They'll call me Rosemanara, the Hawaiian Hot Water Bottle."

She performed a restrained but proficient shoulder movement, singing softly:

*"All the boys along Broadway are strong for chicken raw,
But down in Honolulu they like turkey in the straw——"*

"That's not a nice song to sing here, is it?" she concluded. "Wonder how poor Paul would have sung it. With soul, I suppose."

The library clock buzzed and clicked on the hour.

Rose skipped to the door.

"You ought to go tea-dancing—'I know of two bright eyes, waiting for me'—wonderful for diction—'Old Jim Ryan had a small Hawaiian way down, Way down on Honolulu bay-ay.'"

A serious student, Rose. Tea dancing when she was supposed to be studying the history of church music!

Gradus ad Parnassum

Dorothy reflected that there hadn't been much tea dancing, supper dancing, dinner dancing, breakfast dancing or other meal-time calisthenics since her entry into the home of serious students only.

Life at St. Cecilia, however, was satisfactory enough. The bright promises of the brochure were fulfilled—except that Dorothy had had no contact with the brilliant Michel Soedlich. Soedlich, it appeared, was a visiting lecturer on the lives of famous composers. And as a speaker he was decidedly dull. He was not nearly so fascinating as the young music critic who spoke every two weeks on the theory of aesthetics. Soedlich apparently had memorized a popular pocket dictionary of musicians. He stood awkwardly beside a table and droned out facts in a colorless, almost inaudible voice. He halted frequently to refer to stacks of yellow notes. On warm afternoons, his naturally florid countenance would become glowingly carmine. His baggy clothes hung clumsily about his tall, somewhat adipose figure.

"The kid's got pash lips," Rose whispered to Dorothy while Soedlich was explaining that Mendelssohn took great interest in his sister's work. But in spite of this flattering reference to Soedlich's powers, Dorothy wondered why he had acquired so great a reputation as a coach and as a lover. His attractions were few, so far as she could see. She could hardly imagine him as an inspiring preceptor. Yet it was gossiped that Soedlich had prepared almost every Metropolitan star for important rôles and that few eminent recital singers failed to coach with him several times weekly.

A few days before the graduating exercises, Dorothy came home to find the parlor crowded with her mother's friends.

"We expect big things of Dorothy," she heard her

"Our Little Girl"

mother say. "Her teachers say she is the finest student in the conservatory. Not that I'm the one to boast, especially of my own daughter, but I heard the other day that everyone in the conservatory considers her the most promising singer in years."

The assembly nodded astonishment, pleasure and congratulations over the teacups and knitting.

"And the finest part of it," Dorothy heard Mrs. Loamford continue, "from a mother's point of view, at least, is that Dorothy is the same sweet, dear child she always has been. Her success hasn't turned her head at all."

Dorothy slipped upstairs into the living-room.

Uncle Elliott Reitz was sitting in the big armchair smoking a large cigar and puffing pompously into space.

"Well, if it isn't the little prima donna!" he exclaimed as Dorothy came in. "Going to show Galli-Curci how to sing one of these days, what?"

Dorothy kissed him as she had been brought up to do.

"Your mother tells me big things, Dorothy, big things," he continued. "I can see you as a big proposition in the music game."

"Please," objected Dorothy, "wait till I've made some sort of start. It's very nice of you, of course, but——"

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"Sit down, girl," said Uncle Elliott. "I want to talk cold turkey to you. You're really serious about going into the singing business?"

Dorothy nodded emphatically.

"No nonsense about it, of course," he continued; "shouldn't be; can't be. No boys, I mean?"

Dorothy shook her head.

"No snappy young fellow coming in to put an end to all your work," he went on. "Fine! Work, is what I say, and let marriage take care of itself. A pretty girl

like you's bound to find the right man sooner or later. That's been my observation and I've rubbed shoulders with people in every walk of life."

He bent forward with his hands on his knees.

"Fact is, if I'd known a pretty girl like you when I was a young fellow, I might have taken the plunge myself," he remarked, and laughed like the merry wag he thought himself.

"But, seriously," he resumed, "you've got a big job ahead of you. I want to see you go at it in a big way. Don't wait for things to come to you. Go after them. Be a go-getter. Remember—you've got to sell your stuff to the other fellow if you want to get anywheres. You may be good, but you've got to make good, too. You're an intelligent girl. You understand me?"

"Oh, indeed yes!"

"Good. I hope you don't think your old uncle's butting in with advice where it isn't wanted, but I'm interested in you, Dorothy, and I feel I wouldn't be doing my duty if I didn't hand you the benefit of my experience."

Dorothy thanked him and rewarded him with a kiss.

"And just to think!" pondered Uncle Elliott. "The little baby I used to bring toy pianos to is going to be a great singer. Maybe she'll forget all about old Uncle Elliott. But I guess not! You're a Reitz, Dorothy—don't forget that. The Reitzes make good. That's our way. If I can be of any help—if my twenty-five years of experience is of any use to you—call on me.

"I handled a sort of musical deal the other day. One of my big accounts came in and after I'd sold him a nice fat bill, he told me his wife was giving a benefit concert. They'd hired a hall and everything, but they hadn't sold many tickets. Of course I bought a couple—you can use them if you want to; I haven't much time for

"Our Little Girl"

those things—and then I told him what was what.

"‘The way to make this show a success,’ I told him, ‘is to get back of it and push. Now, if I were you, I’d never leave the house without a pocketful of tickets, and I’d never come back to the house without having sold them.

“‘You’re the boss of a big organization,’ I told him, ‘and what you want to do is get everybody in your shop together and make them work. Sell the proposition to your employees. Get ’em out selling tickets. Offer a bonus for the man who brings in the biggest returns. Make every mother’s son of them take a couple of seats for himself. Let him take them on deferred payments if necessary ; but see that nobody, man, or woman or child, in your place is anywhere on the night of that concert except at the concert. That’s the way to put it over. Get together and push!’ ”

Uncle Elliott ground the burnt end of his cigar aggressively in the ash-stand.

"Mind you," he added, "hats are my line. But business is business, whether you’re selling hats or shoes or automobiles or concerts. It’s the man who goes out and puts the business on the books that wins! So call on me when you’re ready to give a concert, and we’ll show them whether we can’t put the thing across—and put it across big!"

It seemed to Dorothy as though everyone were expecting her to rush from the platform after graduation to Aeolian Hall and to burst into the opening selection of a recital program. Her father looked at her with a quixotic pride. She would have been little surprised if he had kissed her suddenly and said, "What wonders hath God wrought!" Mrs. Loamford took her out to buy a graduation dress and informed the saleswomen that the wearer

of this dress would soon be ranked with the really great artists of the concert stage. Her mother made a point of stopping all chance acquaintances on the street when she was with Dorothy and of mentioning Dorothy's achievements. If Mrs. Loamford had said, "Do you know the soprano?" instead of "Do you know my daughter?" Dorothy would have been no more embarrassed. Arnold announced that he would buy a box for her first recital. Tommy suggested that he might be able to do something for her, although he omitted to specify the nature of his assistance. The distant relatives looked at her as though she were Mary Garden at least, and mumbled "Fancy that!" in its multifold ramifications to each other.

On graduation day, an envelope from the Harmony Concert Bureau arrived.

"Dear Miss Loamford," ran the enclosed letter. "We are glad to congratulate you on this happy day—the day that marks the end of your career as a student—and greet you as a full-fledged artist ready to show your wares to the public.

"We have heard fine reports of your ability and gifts. We understand that you are on the highroad to a brilliant future, and we take pleasure in offering our services as managers for your first recital, which doubtless you will give early in the coming season. A successful first recital is essential to future artistic prosperity. We can insure a successful first recital. Artists making their *début* under our auspices frequently have made many hundreds of dollars as well as receiving fine reviews from leading critics.

"We shall be glad to see you at any time and will be glad to hear from you to make an appointment at your earliest convenience."

Mrs. Loamford borrowed the letter and devoted a morn-

“Our Little Girl”

ing to displaying it to the community. She also passed meaningful hints about various interests that sought Dorothy's services the very minute she was graduated.

At the graduation exercises that night, every student had two documents.

One was the diploma of the St. Cecilia Conservatory of Music.

The other was a letter from the Harmony Concert Bureau.

VII

TWO VERDICTS

After graduation came Tommy.

"I haven't seen you for a long time," remarked Dorothy. "Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"I haven't been keeping myself," answered Tommy, "I've been living at home."

"You were writing a play, weren't you?"

Tommy smiled deprecatingly.

"Oh, yes!" he said, as though that were to end the parley.

"When will we see it?"

Tommy asked permission to smoke a pipe. His plays were like vacation snapshots. They never turned out.

"You'll see it eventually, I suppose," he went on casually. "Several people are interested in it. You know as much about that as I do. I suppose you'll be renting Aeolian Hall next and becoming one of the season's most popular recitalists."

"I don't know. I've received an offer from a manager."

"But you don't mean to say you're going to appear under the generous auspices of the Harmony Concert Bureau!"

Tommy launched this languidly, apparently examining the coloring of his pipe as he spoke.

"I never told you anything about that! How do you know?"

"One picks up things here and there, knocking about doing feature stories. I did a little piece exposing that crowd a few months ago. Probably you didn't read it."

"Our Little Girl"

His gaze indicated that he certainly hoped that she had.

"I've been so busy—but please tell me where and I'll send for a copy."

"It doesn't matter. It was only half a column or so. I called the place the Melody Music Mart to dodge libel although I had the stuff on the crew. It's a simple game. They flatter graduates of conservatories with illiterate mail-order stuff. Then they stage a recital. That's legitimate enough. But the artist has to pay all expenses of the show——"

"Why, that's terrible!"

"No, there's nothing terrible in that. Almost all début recitals are paid for by the artists. It's the usual thing."

"I never heard of that."

"There probably are a lot of things you didn't hear about at St. Cecilia's. However, that's the usual game. And a legitimate bureau charges you a fee for its assistance and supplies the hall and so on at cost. However, the Harmony boys make a genial profit out of the expense budget. Where the customary managerial fee is a hundred dollars, which ought to be all that the bureau should get, Harmony makes another hundred out of a padded rental—look up some concert announcements and see what sort of theatres they give you—inflated printing bills and a postage item that would run Sears, Roebuck for two weeks and three days."

"Mother was so impressed with the letter."

"That was the idea of the letter. I'm glad you mentioned it, because Harmony gets a lot of young singers that way."

"But one of the girls also got a letter and she went to see them and she says they were just lovely to her."

Tommy always seemed a little too knowing.

"Lovely's no word for it. They fall at your feet down

there. They give you a so-called audition. You sing one song and everybody has ecstasies. They speak softly and carry a big stick. Do you know where you come in? You come in for a thousand dollars."

Dorothy studied the floor thoughtfully.

"Isn't that terrible?" she said. "Of course, I suppose I'll have to give a recital sooner or later, and I thought this——"

She made a disconsolate gesture.

Tommy moved closer to her and tried to take her hand in a paternal way. Dorothy resisted his effort.

"Listen, Dot," said Tommy. "I know a man who really is on the inside. He's a critic for a big musical paper. I can give you a note to him and he'll hear you, and he'll tell you what to do. He knows what he's talking about, and he hasn't anything to gain by it. His name's Oscar Fleming. Maybe you've seen some of his articles."

He resumed his attempt to hold Dorothy's hand. This time Dorothy recognized the advance officially. If he couldn't take an unspoken hint——

"Don't, please, Tommy," she said. "I really don't like it. Girls don't, Tommy."

Generalizations removed any seeming confession of prudery.

Tommy overlooked the customary speech about her hands being cold. He admitted defeat by relighting a pipe which was glowing adequately.

"Anyhow," he continued, "it'll be worth your while going to see him. I'll write to him about you, so all you'll have to do is drop in on him—he's always in mornings—and then you'll get straight advice."

"That's very kind of you, Tommy. But I don't want to put you to the trouble——"

"Our Little Girl"

"No trouble."

His hand went out instinctively, but he withdrew it before it obeyed that impulse.

"I like to do things for you, Dot, if you'll let me," he explained. "It's really the only fun I get out of life—doing things for people."

Dorothy wasn't impressed by the speech, but she admitted a sense of gratitude.

"If you've got a sheet of writing paper," he continued, "I'll fix up a note for you right now."

She led him to the desk.

"Oh, you can look on," he said, although she had shown no symptoms of withdrawing while he was composing.

Tommy's unique if not altogether legible script produced a letter:

DEAR MR. FLEMING:

You'll recall me from our interview on why beginners don't captivate critics and like matters.

I'm taking the liberty of introducing Miss Dorothy Reitz Loamford, who, I think, has unusual promise as a chanteuse. She'll be grateful for any advice you may see fit to give her—and, unlike the beginners we discussed, she'll listen to an expert.

And, of course, I'll be grateful, too!

Yours faithfully,

THOMAS A. BERGE.

"How's that?"

"That's lovely of you, Tommy. And such a clever letter, too!"

Tommy inscribed an envelope, "Introducing Miss Dorothy Reitz Loamford."

"If that doesn't bring results," he announced, as he slipped the sheet into the envelope, "we'll try something else that will!"

Dorothy placed the letter in the drawer of the desk.

"And please let me know how it works out," he asked.

Two Verdicts

"Oh, I certainly will."

Tommy looked about indecisively.

"It's not very late," he suggested, "would you like to inspect some nice lowbrow movie where they play nice lowbrow music?"

"It's too late," demurred Dorothy, "and I've been on the go a good deal lately and I'm a little tired."

Tommy discerned a hint.

"I've got to be at work early tomorrow," he said. "So I'll let you get your beauty sleep. Not that you need that sort of sleep."

"You don't have to go, Tommy."

Tommy stretched his arms.

"I might as well," he said.

To remain would be an admission of weakness.

She went to the door with him. They shook hands. It was a short shake. Dorothy saw to that.

"And you'll be sure to let me know what happens?"

"Posolutely," promised Dorothy, "absotively."

It was one of Arnold's favorite forms. "So this is Paris!" was another.

She thought that Tommy winced a bit as she closed the door.

Tommy's note was received enthusiastically by Mrs. Loamford.

"You know," she confided, "I always was a little suspicious of that Harmony Bureau letter. It was nice of him to tell you, wasn't it? He seems to know a great deal about things. We'll go to see this man Fleming, Dorothy."

Dorothy seemed reluctant. Why did her mother have to accompany her everywhere?

"You certainly should go!" insisted her mother. "There can be no harm in it—and you may get just the informa-

"Our Little Girl"

tion you need. If you're bashful—and I don't know why you should be, now that you're a full-fledged graduate—I'll do the talking. Besides, I've always said it does a singer no harm to be on good terms with the critics. They can make or break you."

The upshot of which was that Tommy's letter was presented at the offices of the Champion Piano Company, where Fleming had his headquarters. Several clerical workers took Dorothy and Mrs. Loamford in custody, before a heavily powdered young woman led them to a desk in the centre of a large office which looked like a stenographic bureau.

Fleming proved to be a tall, thin personage, who wore almost black-rimmed glasses which buried their stems in a great quantity of gray-black hair. Fleming's tonsorial arrangements conveyed the notion that he was his own barber. Although his glasses fitted snugly, he seemed to be looking over them.

"You were sent by—Mr. Burke, is it?" he inquired. "Oh, Mr. Borge. Ah, yes, I remember him. A tall young man. Yes, Mr. Borge. You sing, I believe. Soprano?"

"My daughter," answered Mrs. Loamford, "graduated from St. Cecilia's Conservatory. She is a lyric soprano, and her teachers consider her unusually promising . . ."

"I see," commented Fleming, who would have stroked his beard had that been one of his possessions. "Miss Loamford sings."

"Perhaps you would like to have her sing for you, Mr. Fleming," intimated Mrs. Loamford.

She received an ocular kick under the table for this.

"A very good suggestion," agreed Fleming. "Has she brought some of her music?"

"My daughter has memorized her songs."

"Very good," said Fleming, "but I was thinking of an

accompanist. Several of the young men here play. Possibly they may know the accompaniments."

He called a lean, dark youth from a neighboring desk.

"This is Mr. Goldstein," he explained. "Mrs. and Miss Loamford, Mr. Goldstein. Mr. Goldstein is a very fine pianist. I am sure he will be an excellent accompanist."

"Music?" queried Goldstein.

"My daughter has brought no music," said Mrs. Loamford. "But surely you will be able to play her accompaniments. Do you know 'On the Waters to Sing' by Schubert or the Vilanelle by Dell' Acqua?"

Goldstein shook his head.

"Perhaps," suggested Fleming, "Mr. Goldstein can name a few songs he can play without music."

"Just a few things," answered Goldstein, "like 'At Dawning.' Nothing——"

"Excellent!" cried Mrs. Loamford. "Dorothy sings it beautifully. My husband always says he would rather hear Dorothy sing 'At Dawning' than any of her foreign songs. She sings it so nicely!"

Fleming rose.

"Let us go to one of the salons," he said.

He took them to a small chamber, handsomely furnished, which contained three grand pianos with conspicuous price tags.

"I'm sorry," remarked Mrs. Loamford, "that Dorothy can't sing for you her group of old French——"

"I'm sure she'll acquit herself nobly," observed Fleming.

"A flat?" demanded Goldstein.

"For soprano," said Mrs. Loamford.

Goldstein played a few chords. Fleming sat in a chair opposite the piano. Mrs. Loamford sat near Dorothy.

"Our Little Girl"

"Take off your coat, Dorothy," she suggested.

Dorothy placed her coat on the piano. She would have to go through with it, but it wasn't at all what she had pictured. It was too cold, too—too commercial. Goldstein concluded his experiments with modulations, and played the introduction. Dorothy closed her eyes and sang. Fleming sat with his chin in his hands and his eyes closed. Goldstein, at the piano, also lowered his eyelids as he played. Mrs. Loamford didn't close her eyes. One of them was on Dorothy and one on Fleming, if that were possible. She kept time with her head and indicated expression with her hands.

Fleming remained in his posture as Dorothy concluded her last "I love you." Goldstein left the piano.

"All?" he asked.

Fleming looked up.

"Ah, yes," he murmured. "Thank you, Mr. Goldstein. That will be all. Thank you."

"Don't you want to hear——" began Mrs. Loamford; but for once, Dorothy's glances stopped her.

"Very nice," remarked Fleming, as Goldstein departed.

"Now do you really think——" Mrs. Loamford started.

"You have studied for how many years?" interrupted Fleming.

"About three years steadily," replied Mrs. Loamford before Dorothy could answer. "But Dorothy had been singing all her life. In fact, she could sing before she could speak. Even as a little tot, she was most musical. She played toy pianos before she could walk. She had considerable instruction before she went to the conservatory. Our family—that is, mine—has always been musical. My brother——"

Two Verdicts

Fleming interrupted the lecture with a cough.

"Miss Loamford obviously is musical," he said. "She seems to have natural pitch and natural placement. Her lower tones are not natural, but I have heard of singers who have overcome this defect by selecting songs which did not tax the lower register."

"If you could hear my daughter in——"

Fleming continued.

"The upper tones are somewhat shrill. The throat is not relaxed properly. Some singers never acquire this knack. For concert work, however, they are adequate. The middle register is charming when it is not forced. Do not abuse it, Miss Loamford, and it will be an extremely valuable asset. Your diction is quite clear. Evidently you have been well taught in this respect."

Mrs. Loamford tapped her foot impatiently. Fleming was too slow in getting to the point.

"Now, about a recital——" she said.

He bowed to Dorothy, who was still standing by the piano.

"I always think," he began cautiously, "that another year or two of study——"

"Why, she is a graduate——" cut in Mrs. Loamford. Fleming bowed.

"If there is any reason for haste, I must, of course, defer to your judgment. As her mother, you must know. At all events, a summer's coaching with some competent instructor would be well."

"Whom would you suggest??"

"There are several. Personally, I like to recommend Michel Soedlich."

Dorothy smiled happily.

Mrs. Loamford explained that Dorothy had studied with Soedlich at the conservatory.

"Our Little Girl"

"Personal coaching, I mean," elucidated Fleming. "An hour or so daily. It will be fairly expensive, because Mr. Soedlich is much in demand, but it will be worth while. He is a master of interpretation."

"Well, we can see about that," said Mrs. Loamford. "What I really wanted to find out was what you thought about a manager."

Fleming sat awhile in thought.

"Probably you could do no better," he said finally "than to see Mr. Maxwell—Saul Maxwell—of the Underwood Concert Corporation. The Underwood bureau isn't the largest in the city, but it stands very high and as far as I know, does everything to help young artists. You will find Mr. Maxwell most charming and I know that his organization will do everything in its power to make your daughter's début a success."

"And will they give her a contract?"

"That is a matter for you to discuss with Mr. Maxwell."

Mrs. Loamford wrote the name and address on the back of a card.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Fleming."

Fleming led them to an elevator.

"I'm always glad to be of service, Miss Loamford, I wish you the greatest possible success in your career. Call on me if I can help you. I am always here."

He paused, although it was clear that he had something more to say.

"By the way," he added, "if you ever need a piano, I shall be glad to take you through the warerooms. We have some remarkably fine instruments here. Let me present you with one of our booklets. It is interesting reading."

The elevator arrived.

Fleming shook hands with his visitors.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Fleming," said Dorothy. "It's so kind of you to give me so much of your time."

"We appreciate your advice so much," added Mrs. Loamford.

Fleming bowed.

"He's very nice," observed Dorothy.

"Very nice"—and very meaningless. How could Mr. Fleming form any opinion of her singing after one song? This might be an audition, but it was an audition of little significance. She wondered whether all music critics looked like Fleming or behaved so suavely. She had always thought of them as savage, sarcastic gentlemen whose chief joy in life was ironic destruction. She remembered Madame Graaberg's only words on the subject: "The critics killed my poor Paul."

"We'll look up this man Maxwell," said Mrs. Loamford. "Perhaps I'd better take your Uncle Elliott with me to settle the business side of it."

"Please don't," begged Dorothy. "Tommy says it's all automatic. I'm sure the Underwood bureau is reliable. We used to get passes for their concerts at St. Cecilia's."

"Well, we'll see," commented Mrs. Loamford.

Dorothy didn't report promptly to Tommy. Tommy heard nothing of her visit to Fleming for ten days. Then he telephoned.

"I've been so busy," apologized Dorothy, "that I just didn't get to phoning you. Mr. Fleming was lovely."

"Where did he tell you to go?"

"To the Underwood bureau. Mr. Maxwell, I think, he said."

"It's a good place."

There was silence across the wire.

"Our Little Girl"

"Are you doing anything tonight?"

"I'm sorry, Tommy. I'm afraid I can't do anything."

His behavior on his last visit had made it seem advisable not to encourage him—and yet, he was a valuable ally, professionally. If only he would be content to be a professional ally!

"Tomorrow night?"

"I'll be busy."

"Wait till I see."

"How about Thursday?"

A short silence. It was no use putting him off indefinitely.

"Yes, you can come up Thursday."

Tommy seemed to be rather cleaned up on Thursday night. His clothes were beautifully pressed. He wore a stiff collar—something new in Dorothy's experience. There were evidences that a barber had functioned within the hour.

Tommy had tickets for a motion-picture house. It was a remarkable picture this week, he said, although it wasn't for hoi polloi—Tommy never said "the" hoi polloi—and well worth seeing. Dorothy was willing to go and delayed only so long over the traditional rite of "dressing" that they arrived at the theatre after half of the film had been exhibited. The large auditorium was empty. Hoi polloi evidently had found more entertaining screenings elsewhere.

The great merit of the picture doubtless prompted Tommy to discourse rapidly on matters in no way connected with the art of the cinema.

"I like to go out with you," he confessed. "It's different."

Dorothy smiled and giggled a bit. It was genial but noncommittal. The response encouraged Tommy.

"Most of the girls I know," he continued, "aren't serious about things. They like to go out with more or less attractive young men and dance. Headhunters, I call them. Hunting a head for the family."

He studied the effect of his aphorism. There was not much to study, for Dorothy considered it best to draw him out further.

"What I like about you," he confessed, "is your determination to go through with something you really want to do. Most girls would be satisfied with hanging around waiting for daddy to come home. But you want to sing—and you're going through with it. You could have stayed home and played around if you wanted to, you know."

"I know it."

"Yes, and that's what I like. You didn't go the easiest—I mean the obvious way. It's harder, doing what you're doing, but it's more real, if you understand me. You may not find success right away, you know."

Dorothy seemed to be looking at the film too raptly to be appreciative. Tommy didn't interest her when he was serious.

"And things may break wrong. You may be nervous at your first recital or out of voice or draw the wrong run of critics or hit opposition——"

"What do you mean, Tommy?"

Tommy sought her hands, which she promptly folded. It was a defence for which he had no counter-move.

"Well, what I mean is that you mustn't be discouraged if everything doesn't go sensationally at first. But as long as you believe in yourself, dear——"

Dorothy turned to him sharply.

"We're in a public place, Tommy."

She didn't like to rebuke him, but he was growing annoyingly intimate.

"Our Little Girl"

Tommy grinned.

"All right, darling. That isn't so affectionate."

"I don't like such endearments, Tommy. Please don't."

"Not from anybody?"

He looked sharply to see where this shot would land.

"Not from anybody."

"You're not discriminating against me?" he said lightly.

She determined to break this line of attack.

"No, and it's nothing to talk about anyhow."

"Not in a public place?"

"Not in any place."

He sighed lugubriously.

"That's just it," he murmured, "nobody calls me darling and when I try to call anybody else darling——"

"Is that a habit?"

"No, Dot, darling——"

"I told you not to——"

"Well, I won't—if you don't want me to, baby."

"I won't be called baby."

"Very good, Miss Loamford. Or would you prefer Madame Loamford?"

He laughed softly.

"Don't mind the kidding, Dot. I guess you understand."

"I don't understand being called darling, dearie, baby and such things."

He looked at her seriously.

"If you really don't like it, Dot, why, that settles it as far as I'm concerned. So we'll stick to the picture."

He felt a sudden thump against his shoulder. He turned about quickly, coming up face to face with a stout, red-faced woman.

"If you two want to make love," announced the stout,

red-faced woman in a voice whose carrying power was by no means confined to the immediate vicinity, "get out on a bus and do your petting there. Some people like to enjoy the pictures without love-making."

She leaned back and continued, apparently to herself: "Some people make me sick, loving up in movie places. I've a good mind to call the usher and tell him to make some people behave. Disgusting. I call it. Some people——"

The diatribe faded into a confused mumbling.

Tommy turned to Dorothy.

"Funny, isn't it?" he commented, none too softly. "Some people like to yell in public."

He felt that it wasn't a very good effort to cover his confusion. Dorothy smiled enigmatically. Another thump from the rear followed.

"What did you say?" demanded the stout, red-faced woman. "Did you have something to say? Say it again, will you? Say it again!"

Tommy turned about quickly and whispered to Dorothy.

"It isn't much of a picture," he confided. "Let's go somewhere where there aren't so many pests."

Dorothy nodded, put on her hat and rose quickly. The stout red-faced woman also rose.

"I want to talk to you, young man," she said. "Come here just a minute."

Tommy disregarded her.

"Come on, Dot," he whispered, taking Dorothy by the arm.

He hurried her up the aisle to the door. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw his adversary starting after him.

"Some people have a lot of nerve!" he heard her exclaim. "A decent woman can't come to a picture show

"Our Little Girl"

without being annoyed by mushy couples. It's a shame——"

But he had escaped to the lobby, and the stout red-faced woman evidently had no intention of pursuing him.

He forced a laugh. "Funny, wasn't it?"

"I rather wanted to see the rest of the picture," pouted Dorothy. She didn't, but Tommy had to be put in his place—painlessly, if possible.

"Never mind, dear," he said, pressing her arm so sharply that she withdrew it. "We'll see it somewhere else sometime. Now, let's go and inspect a coffee house."

He led Dorothy to a little place which boasted orange-shaded lamps on marble-topped tables.

"You're an awfully good sport," he said, as he finished ordering pastry and coffee for two. "It was rather an experience, wasn't it?"

Dorothy smiled wanly. It might have been embarrassing if the stout woman had followed them to the street.

"That's another thing I like about you," he continued. "You take things pretty much as they come. If I were a young man ready to propose——"

He slackened his verbal pace and watched the effect of his words.

"—I suppose I'd ask you whether you weren't even willing to take *me* pretty much as I come, but——"

"Listen, Tommy!"

Dorothy had the floor. She would let him know directly how she regarded his insinuations.

"Don't say such things, please. I'm not interested in marriage and things like that. Don't let's talk about them."

He laughed.

"Is that technique?" he inquired. "You must be pretty well hardened to proposals."

"I don't enjoy them," she said. "I don't like to have my friends talk to me like that."

"What do you do to young men who propose to you?"

"They don't—I don't want to talk about it. It breaks off friendships when things get that way."

It struck her as a happy and tender warning and she looked at him as who should say, "I hope you understand that, once for all." Tommy did.

"Oh, very good——"

Then Tommy began to speak of opera.

As he left Dorothy at 137 West 88th Street, he observed that it was a good thing that he wasn't one of the young men who had proposed to her. But would she care to see that movie again—at some other theatre?

"I've had a lovely time tonight, Tommy. Ring me up sometime."

"We can make it now, if you like."

No! He might take it as a hopeful symptom.

"You'd better ring me up. Then I'll have my date-book. Thank you so much."

He shook her hand.

"Good night—and best luck in your singing."

She withdrew her hand.

"Thank you so much, Tommy. Good night."

"See you again soon—yes?"

She smiled.

Tommy blew her a kiss.

"Good night."

Perhaps she had treated him badly. He had done much for her—and she might have let him at least hold her hand in return. But he didn't appeal to her. She liked him in the way that she liked a well-cooked meal, but as for anything serious——! She tried to think of Tommy as her husband—ugh! And he would be a hus-

"Our Little Girl"

band to the full extent, too! She could see why Arnold frowned when Tommy was mentioned.

Now Arnold—she wasn't certain, but——

How slovenly Tommy would look next to Arnold. If she were married to Arnold——

As she undressed, she reflected on the matter. Arnold wouldn't be so bad. She wondered what it would be like to have Arnold with her now. Then Tommy flashed across her thoughts. Oh! Arnold any time! She hoped that she had taught Tommy a lesson. Arnold had learned it quickly—but he wasn't vulgar, like Tommy. Tommy was vulgar—that's what it was. To live with a vulgar man—ugh!

Arnold was, after all, sweet. She liked the idea of a man being sweet. Of course, he might be a little more—what was it? A little more——

VIII

WHERE IS THY STING?

LOAMFORD—Samuel Charles Loamford, beloved husband of Martha Rertz Loamford, at his home, 137 West 88th Street, after a brief illness. Funeral private. Kindly omit flowers.

The passing of Mr. Loamford left Dorothy with no tangible sensations. She knew that her father had been ill for a week and that Dr. Knight had described that illness as a mild case of influenza. Then, late one afternoon, Dr. Knight looked serious and spoke in a low voice. In the early evening, he took Dorothy into the sickroom, where an unobtrusive nurse hovered about the background. Her father was sleeping. He looked much as he had always looked, although fever had given him a color which he rarely had had. Dr. Knight motioned Dorothy to say nothing. She tiptoed out again. Her mother was pale and wept constantly. Dr. Knight advised Dorothy to eat dinner alone. It was best for Mrs. Loamford to lie down and rest. Ten minutes after a desultory meal, Dr. Knight came to Dorothy in the library, his head bowed. He said nothing. She understood.

He took her back to the sickroom. The nurse was arranging the chamber neatly. She followed Dr. Knight to the bed. Her father looked peaceful. There was a quiet smile on his features.

"Thank God, he passed away without pain," murmured Dr. Knight. "He was a good man."

Dorothy sat beside the bed and cried softly for a few minutes. Then she went to her mother's room. Mrs.

"Our Little Girl"

Loamford seemed to be in a state of exhaustion. Dorothy kissed her and left. Uncle Elliott arrived shortly. He kissed Dorothy gently and entered the room where his brother-in-law had died. He came out again after a few minutes and went to the telephone in the hall, where he made arrangements for the funeral. He spoke briefly with Dr. Knight, and announced that he would stay at the Loamford house that evening.

There was nothing for Dorothy to do. Death had come into her life suddenly and quietly. She had seen some of her friends under like conditions. Always, it had seemed to her, there was a tenseness, a hysteria. The loss of a parent, she had learned, was one of the great tragedies of life. And yet, her father was lying dead in the house and there was nothing more than an unwonted silence. She had little to say to her mother. Her mother had little to say to her. They spoke of everyday things, such as ordering the meat and sending the servant girl to the grocer. Animation had passed from the routine existence of their daily lives. Otherwise, things had not changed.

The funeral was attended by almost two hundred persons. Loamford had never had many friends, so far as his family knew. There were a few elderly gentlemen who came up now and then to play cards. Beyond these, he seemed to have no intimates, nor had he ever sought companions. Yet it seemed as though all the employees of the Cosmopolitan Bonding Company were trying to crowd into the parlor. They gathered in little groups in the hall and spoke in subdued voices. Dorothy and her mother sat upstairs in the library, dressed in mourning, and saying nothing. Now and then Mrs. Loamford sobbed gently.

Finally Uncle Elliott came in with Dr. Welch, who was to conduct the services. Dorothy remembered Dr.

Where Is Thy Sting?

Welch dimly from the few times that she had attended Sunday-school. He was tall and thin, with a patriarchal white beard. He bowed sombrely to the women, and sat in a corner with Uncle Elliott. He glanced at his watch and beckoned Dorothy and her mother to go down to the parlor, where Loamford's body lay. The coffin was strewn with wreaths from the Cosmopolitan Bonding Company. There was a silence when Dr. Welch and the family entered. Dr. Welch delivered a short invocation in a deep, dry voice. Then he looked up.

"My good friends," he said, "we come together under the shadow of the angel of death which has touched our good friend whose spirit is with us, although all that was mortal of him——"

It was an endless speech, Dorothy thought. Dr. Welch spoke eloquently of the meaning of life and the meaning of death and of love and friendship and the lesson to be learned from a life of faith and devotion. What had all this to do with her father? This flowery address, with its interminable metaphors, might apply to anyone. Dr. Welch spoke beautifully, like an actor who had learned well the lines of a gifted author. But what did it mean, applied to her father, a distant little man whom she had known chiefly as some one who left the house early every morning and who came home late every afternoon? It was affecting, to be sure. She heard women sobbing and she saw tired-looking men rub their eyes with the backs of their hands. Her mother seemed to be weeping. She could not be certain. Uncle Elliott sat near the minister, looking exhausted and grave.

She heard Dr. Welch's voice drop. He was muttering a prayer. There was a scraping of chairs, and the mourners passed to the street, where a long black motor-car was waiting. Dorothy took Uncle Elliott's proffered

"Our Little Girl"

arm and followed him out of the house after Dr. Welch and her mother. They entered an automobile behind the long car. No one spoke. The automobile started slowly to Central Park West and down across Fifty-ninth Street to the cemetery on Long Island.

Dorothy could not describe the emotions which she felt on the ride or at the grave or on the trip home. Everything was blankly solemn. She looked in a mirror and discovered that she was pale and that her eyes were red. She had been weeping, she supposed, although she was hardly aware of it.

There were letters and a heavily engrossed resolution from the Cosmopolitan Bonding Company. Dorothy was surprised to find notes addressed to her. There were three of them. First she opened one in a writing that was strange. It was a long, tactful missive from Bennie Wallace. Odd, that he should write! He was a pleasant young man whom she had known casually for two years. Yet there was something very personal about this letter. She passed it to her mother, who pronounced it very lovely. It was Bennie Wallace's specialty.

Arnold Deering had written. It was a stilted attempt, ending with an invitation to go driving in his new car. At times like these, a quiet ride in the country was most beneficial. It was nice of Arnold. Mrs. Loamford thought so too. He was a fine, thoughtful young man.

Tommy's note was short and awkward. He did not know what to say. He had always liked her father. He would come soon. If there was anything at all he could do——

Uncle Elliott came, bringing a recent book of travel for Dorothy. It would divert her mind. He hoped that his sister and Dorothy were sufficiently composed to hear the details of the estate. They were.

Where Is Thy Sting?

Loamford, it developed, had left far more money than anyone would have thought. His salary was not large, but his investments had been admirable. His evenings with the sharply pointed pencils and the little looks apparently had not been devoted entirely to grocery accounts. He had been a shrewd trader. He had left his estate in valuable bonds and a few tried and dividend-paying stocks. There would be ample income for almost anything the family cared to do. If they cared to, they could dispose of this large house and move into an apartment. They could afford the best.

Here Mrs. Loamford began to weep and to murmur that her husband had been such a good man.

Dorothy's musical career could be continued easily, Uncle Elliott added. Loamford had left several thousands a year especially for this purpose. His will was a model of its kind. His estate was in perfect shape. There were no debts.

They gazed out of the window. Then the telephone rang. It was Arnold. Would they care to take a little drive? Uncle Elliott thought that it would be an excellent idea for them to be out in the air for an hour or so. They hated to trouble Arnold, but it was so kind of him. Was he sure that they weren't imposing on him?

Arnold arrived in an amazingly short time. He took them up into Pelham, where he suggested tea at an almost deserted road-house. It was a good idea. Arnold gossiped pleasantly of his friends. He ventured a few jests and was rewarded with subdued smiles. All felt better on the way back. Turning from Broadway on 88th Street, they saw Tommy walking up the avenue. He bowed. Arnold waved to him. Dorothy and Mrs. Loamford nodded.

"Funny goof," commented Arnold. "One of the most

"Our Little Girl"

conceited men I know. A good fellow in his way, but he does hate himself!"

They smiled.

They thanked Arnold for his kindness. It was nothing. He was glad to be of service. They could call on him at any time. Perhaps they would care to go out again tomorrow. They would see. Possibly, if it wasn't too much trouble. None at all. He could always get away from the office.

Uncle Elliott suggested that the best thing now was a little trip. Atlantic City. It would do them good. Then they could make plans when they returned. No hurry about anything.

When they arrived at Atlantic City, they found their rooms full of flowers. Dorothy inspected the cards.

"So thoughtful of Arnold!" exclaimed Mrs. Loamford. "He's been a real friend to us. Hasn't he?"

"A very good friend," agreed Dorothy.

There was a letter from Tommy.

"Incidentally," it concluded, "I'm the slave now of Mr. Maxwell of the Underwood Concert Corporation. I write the elegant blurbs that you see in the musical papers—if you see the musical papers. If you come under his management when you resume your career, you may be sure of one thing: The press department will be yours to command."

"That's very nice of him," commented Mrs. Loamford.

Dorothy nodded. Tommy was at his best professionally.

IX

PRELUDE

Even the most delightful vacation following a death in the family must end, and after two months Dorothy and her mother terminated their two weeks' visit to Atlantic City. There had been talk of a trip to Europe, but Uncle Elliott had vetoed the plan. Dorothy was ready for her début. A year in Europe would postpone this important event. Dorothy was prepared to begin her professional career. A year in Europe would find her stale. There is no time like the present. Do it now!

Dorothy abandoned heavy mourning apparel on her return from the city of too little trouble, but her mother preferred to retain the emblems of bereavement. Samuel Charles Loamford was fading quickly. He was already a fairly well-established tradition. Dorothy rarely mentioned him, and her mother brought him into conversation in only one way: "As I used to tell my poor dear husband."

It was late in September that Dorothy rummaged through her desk for the address of the Underwood Concert Corporation. The bureau was in a great office building in the early forties near Fifth Avenue. It was an edifice seemingly dedicated to concert managements. The doors to most of these establishments were almost always ajar, and the voyager in the corridors had only to peep within to see enormous lithographs of most of the popular artists of the day. Surrounded by half a dozen rival agencies was the Underwood Concert Corporation, Saul Maxwell, Mgr.

Mrs. Loamford had made an appointment with Mr.

"Our Little Girl"

Maxwell, "who sounded very nice over the phone."

"Now for heaven's sake, Dorothy," she warned her daughter, "don't fidget when you get there. Remember you're twenty-two. You're an artist. Let me do the talking."

The Underwood office was arranged much like the other bureaus in the building. The door led into a small outer chamber inhabited by a switchboard operator and a typist. Back of a wooden railing were four small doors, side by side. Reading from left to right as you entered they announced that behind the doors were to be found Saul Maxwell, Mgr., Hamilton Harper, Asst. Mgr., Press Dept., and Shipping Room respectively. The proprietress of the switchboard announced "Mrs. Loamford calling on Mr. Maxwell," and invited the visitors to wait until Mr. Maxwell had completed a conference. She offered them copies of musical magazines of July to while away the interval.

"Mr. Maxwell will see you now."

Dorothy and Mrs. Loamford instinctively smoothed their garments and powdered their noses.

"First door to your left."

Mrs. Loamford led the way through the little swinging gate and opened the first door to her left.

A plump gentleman of medium height, almost bald save for a few long reddish-blond hairs carefully plastered down arose from a mahogany armchair. He smiled, showing small white teeth, and motioned for them to enter, indicating chairs on either side of a large, glass-topped table. Dorothy noticed that a tall pale woman with obviously henna hair had her hand on the knob of a door which led to the adjoining compartment.

"Mrs. Loamford?" said Maxwell in a soft, precise voice.

His pale blue eyes shifted to Dorothy.

"And Miss Loamford? How do you do? I am Mr. Maxwell."

"Well, Saul, I might as well——"

Maxwell turned to the woman at the door.

"All right, Elsie," he said. "You can take that date at South Bend. You'll be at Indianapolis on the twenty-second anyhow. We'll wire you there if anything turns up——"

He looked at Dorothy and Mrs. Loamford.

"Mrs. and Miss Loamford," he remarked, with an introductory gesture. "This is Madame Elsie Freron of the Metropolitan Opera Company."

Madame Freron smiled brightly.

"So glad to know you, I'm sure," she observed.

The Loamfords bowed in return.

"One of our brightest stars," continued Maxwell.

He squeezed Madame Freron's hand cordially.

"All set, Elsie?"

"I guess so. Think I'll see Ham before I go."

"Good."

Madame Freron departed.

"Probably you've heard her," commented Maxwell, as he returned to the desk.

Dorothy recalled Madame Freron as a mezzo-soprano who appeared two or three times annually at the Metropolitan in small rôles.

Maxwell shoved aside a collection of letters on his desk and turned to Mrs. Loamford.

"From what you told me the other day," he began, "I take it that Miss Loamford contemplates a recital. You were recommended here, I believe, by Mr. Fleming. We are always glad to meet artists from Mr. Fleming."

"My daughter," said Mrs. Loamford, "is a soprano,

"Our Little Girl"

as I told you. Mr. Fleming and her teachers believe that she has an unusual career ahead of her. We are anxious, of course, to have her come under a good management, and Mr. Fleming suggested this bureau."

"Miss Loamford has never given a recital?"

"Not yet. Of course she sang at the recitals at St. Cecilia's Conservatory when she was a student there, but I didn't think it wise for Dorothy to give a public concert until she was ready."

"You believe that she is prepared?"

"Oh, indeed yes! In fact, we gave up a trip to Europe so that she could make her *début* now."

Maxwell studied his finger-tips reflectively.

"You realize, I suppose," he said, "the importance of a New York *début*. A singer's future really depends on it. There are hundreds of *débuts* every year and only a few artists succeed in making any impression on the critics or the public. There would be thousands of *débuts* if all the artists who thought that they were fit to appear were in a position to see a concert through. We have anywhere from five to ten applications a day. I have four in the morning's mail on my desk. Most of them—all of them, I should say—are from people who have no business appearing in public. Your daughter isn't a *coloratura*?"

Mrs. Loamford denied the charge. Dorothy was a lyric soprano. An unusually talented lyric soprano.

"That's promising. It's amazing how many *coloraturas* there are. I can't understand it. Almost everyone who writes in is a *coloratura*."

Dorothy thought of Rose Manning and smiled a little maliciously.

"The policy of this management is to make *débuts* possible for any promising artist. Many bureaus are inter-

ested only in the management fee. What I am driving at is that the mere appearance, as such, is available to anyone who can afford it. We have a certain standard, however. The artists who appear under our direction gain a certain prestige by that connection. I haven't had the pleasure of hearing Miss Loamford sing."

"Dorothy will be delighted to sing for you at almost any time, Mr. Maxwell," suggested Mrs. Loamford. "I am sure of that——"

"One of the curious things about this business," he said, "is that we have several artists whom I've never heard. They came to us well recommended. They made successful débuts. We've booked them all over the country. But I've never had the opportunity to attend one of their concerts. Now, in the case of Miss Loamford, I'm willing to take Mr. Fleming's word. I admit that Miss Loamford's experience is limited, but I frequently go on impressions. I hardly think that Miss Loamford would become panic-stricken in front of an audience and critics."

Maxwell seemed to be a man of experience, thought Dorothy.

"How much would it cost?" interposed Mrs. Loamford rather impatiently.

Her mother, Dorothy fancied, was too eager to bring up the commercial side of things.

"That is up to you for the most part. Your chief expenses will be rental, advertising, circulars, if you want them, postage and an accompanist. You can keep these costs within five hundred dollars if you care to. Of course, if you want to do the thing elaborately you can spend almost any amount. Including the management fee, you can give the recital for six to seven hundred dollars at the outside."

"Our Little Girl"

It seemed reasonable enough to Dorothy.

Mrs. Loamford looked rather determined.

"Is this customary?" she inquired. "I thought that artists were paid for giving recitals!"

Why, Dorothy wondered sorrowfully, did her mother insist on being so naïve?

"Established artists who draw at the box-office are. I have never heard of a début recital on any other basis except the one I outlined for you."

"That's—that's what I had heard," said Mrs. Loamford, and wondered why Maxwell suppressed a grin.

"You are in a position to go through with this program?" he asked.

"We are," she answered. "Of course you will arrange concerts for my daughter which will bring her a fee."

"That depends entirely on the success of the début recital. If her notices are good, we shall consider the matter. You realize, of course, that the concert field is overcrowded. But there is always room for able young singers who can build up a following. I have in mind a young soprano who came to us about three years ago. To be frank, I was not greatly impressed by this young woman. She pleaded so hard, however, for an opportunity to appear under our auspices that we arranged a recital for her. Much to my surprise, the critics hailed her as the greatest find of the year, and requests for appearances came from all parts of the country. Today we can book her for fifty or sixty concerts annually at a very nice fee. Of course, that was an exceptional case.

"Mind you, I don't mean to imply that Miss Loamford will not be able to do the same thing. I merely wish to acquaint you with the facts, so that you will give the recital with your eyes open."

The telephone bell jangled. Maxwell answered in a

low voice. While he was speaking, Mrs. Loamford summoned Dorothy to a corner of the room.

"I don't know, Dorothy," she said softly. "He seems to be honest."

"Mr. Fleming said——"

"For all you know, he may be in with Mr. Fleming in some way."

"I like Mr. Maxwell. He seems to know what he's talking about."

(And her mother didn't.)

"Oh, I grant you that. Probably they're all pretty much alike in this business, anyhow."

"I'd just as leave give my recital with him——"

"After all, you're giving the concert. I'm not. If he satisfied you, you might as well——"

Maxwell's voice interrupted them.

"If you'd care to have a private conference," he suggested, "I can——"

"No!"

Mrs. Loamford and Dorothy returned to their chairs.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Maxwell," said Mrs. Loamford. "We've decided to give this recital. We expect you to keep down the expenses as much as possible, but I want my daughter to have a really fine début. A great many important people are interested in her, and——"

"You understand, I take it, that the box-office receipts, whatever they may be, are yours? I didn't mention that because most début recitals draw almost nothing."

"Then how does it happen that the papers always speak of full houses?"

"It seems to be fashionable for critics who do not attend recitals to mention full houses. Very often the house may be crowded when the total receipts amount to

"Our Little Girl"

twenty-five dollars. We have plenty of ways of filling a house. Ever so many people are willing to go to concerts if some one will send them passes."

"Anyone who wants to hear my daughter should pay for their tickets!"

"That's not an uncommon point-of-view. If you wish it, we can suspend the pass list. In that event, however, I won't answer for the attendance."

He turned to Dorothy.

"May I ask you, Miss Loamford, how you feel about it?"

She saw no grounds for debate in the matter.

"I'd rather have a good audience," said Dorothy.

"It is rather discouraging to sing to rows of empty seats," observed Maxwell. "There's nothing degrading about issuing passes. I assure you that we have to do it, much as I regret it, for several of our most famous artists. There are very few concerts given in this city which do not depend for their patronage to some extent on the holders of free admissions. I dare say that you received many passes when you were at the conservatory.

"Let me give you an instance. You may remember Klopfer, who despite his name was a violinist, not a pianist. He had a tremendous reputation abroad. It was said that his name on one poster in a public place was sufficient to sell out any concert hall in Vienna. When he came here he was certain that he could draw equally well. His manager permitted Klopfer to place in the contract a clause to the effect that no free tickets were to be issued to any of his recitals. Klopfer scored a great artistic success as a performer of serious music. Yet, when his second recital was announced, the total box-office sale amounted to seventeen dollars the day before the con-

cert. His manager begged him to waive the clause relative to passes. Klopfer insisted that no free admissions be granted. There were exactly sixty-four parquet seats occupied at the second recital. Klopfer's heart was broken. The critics noted a lack of brilliancy in his playing. After all, Klopfer could not do his best in a large, empty hall. He grew bitter. He decided that the American public had no taste. He returned to Europe long before the expiration of his contract. He has never returned to this country. In Europe, however, he is one of the greatest drawing cards among violinists.

"I sometimes wish that Klopfer had been with us. I think that I could have persuaded him to let us fill his early houses for him. He had the admiration of the critics and he would have won the public eventually had he adjusted himself to American ways. But that is the way of the concert business. Here was an artist, as great in his way as Kreisler or Heifetz, whose American visit is notorious among managers as a monumental failure."

Maxwell came out of his reverie.

"That's that, anyhow," he remarked, crisply. "Now we might as well consider a date for your recital. I take it you'd like Aeolian Hall."

"That would be lovely," agreed Dorothy.

Maxwell consulted a note-book.

"I can give you the second Saturday afternoon in October," he said. "That date was held for another recital which has been canceled. Saturday afternoons are particularly good for débuts."

The Loamfords nodded.

"You sing under your own name?"

Dorothy looked puzzled. If she had had an impossible, unpronounceable name——

"Why, yes——"

"Our Little Girl"

Mrs. Loamford edged nearer the desk.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Maxwell," she said, "but you've hit on something that's been on my mind for a long time. I think that my daughter ought to appear as Dorothy Reitz. That's her middle name—Reitz. It's my maiden name. I think it's a prettier name than Loamford for the concert stage, and Dorothy's uncle, Mr. Elliott Reitz—you must know him; the famous hat man—is so well known that the name would arouse interest. I may be old-fashioned, too, but I think it preferable to have her sing as Dorothy Reitz. Don't you think so, Mr. Maxwell?"

"I'm afraid that my jurisdiction doesn't extend so far. If you prefer—I was only asking so that I could notify the hall management for whom to hold the auditorium."

"Then hold it for Dorothy Reitz, please," beamed Mrs. Loamford. "That'll make everything much easier for you, Dorothy."

She turned solemnly to Maxwell.

"Besides," she added, "my poor dear husband isn't dead a year, and some people might think it curious if his daughter sang in public so soon after his death."

"Very well," assented Maxwell. "Dorothy Reitz it is—if Miss Loamford has no objections."

For once, her mother seemed to be right. "Loamford" was a little—what? It didn't sound like the name of a singer. Neither did "Reitz"—but "Dorothy Reitz" had a more artistic ring to it. Dorothy was a bit vexed that she had not thought of it first.

"Now I'll introduce you to Mr. Harper, my associate, who takes care of the recital itself. You can make all arrangements with him. He will see to your tickets, printing, advertising and so on."

He wrote a few lines on a "Snappygram" blank, issued by an enterprising music publisher for the use of big executives.

"Just pass through this door to the next office. Mr. Harper is at his desk. You will pardon me. There are several people waiting to see me, I believe. Don't hesitate to call on me when I can be of service. We'll meet soon again, I'm sure."

He opened the door to the next office.

"Mr. Harper," he said, "I want you to meet Miss Reitz and Mrs. Loamford. Miss Reitz has that open date at Aeolian."

They entered a small office, where Hamilton Harper was dictating to a pretty young stenographer.

"—we want you to put over this concert in a big way," they heard him dictate, "and we beg to advise you that the advertising material—just a minute, Classy."

The stenographer poised her pencil. Hamilton Harper rose.

"Have a chair, ladies," he said.

"You can do the rest of the mail now, Classy," he added. "Come back later. Or go out and feed your face."

X

FOR ART'S SAKE

"And now, ladies, we'll see what we can do for you."

Hamilton Harper swung two chairs into line near his desk.

"Some juggling, what?"

He smiled and slapped his hands together with so extraordinary a detonation that Dorothy jumped.

"Daily dozen," he went on. "Get out of bed, open the window and——"

He went through a series of evolutions.

"Makes you ready to lick your weight in wildcats. I've done it, too!"

Dorothy wondered what manner of handmaiden to the arts Hamilton Harper might be. Maxwell didn't look like an artist or even like one interested in the more cultural aspects of life, but there was something gentle, almost poetic in his intonation. Harper, with his full, protruding underlip, his small but muscular frame, his brilliantly colored cravat and his checked suit, corresponded to her mental picture of a prize fighter. The long, thick yellow hair, coarse and straight, and the flat, pugnacious nose confirmed the impression. Harper's voice was rough and his speech Dorothy would have characterized as "Western." He was distinctly a breezy sort, she concluded; a good business man, probably.

Harper studied the "Snappygram" which Mrs. Loamford deposited on the desk.

"So you've got the date at Aeolian!" he remarked, and everyone in the next room became aware of the fact. "Good! Soprano! Fine! Got a program?"

Mrs. Loamford was about to answer—and didn't. She didn't quite approve of so much energy devoted to the discussion of matters which rested in a higher plane. She could have held forth continuously to Maxwell; she was taken aback by Harper. Dorothy, however, was attracted by the frankness of Harper's manner. There was something paternal in his ruggedness. She felt that her suggestions would be received sympathetically.

"I was planning a program of four groups," she said. "Old Italian, Old French, lieder—in German, possibly—and a group of modern songs."

"That's a good, safe program for a start," commented Harper. "Show 'em what you've got. That's the idea. Later on you can specialize and hand 'em an evening of Bessarabian jazz hymns. But better begin with old man Mozart or old Oratorio—you know, Handel. Show 'em you can sing that stuff. Old French is good, too. Shows class. That's what you want: Class."

"And the lieder?" inquired Dorothy. "Had I better sing those in English?"

"Hell, no, little lady!" exploded Harper enthusiastically. "You can sing 'em in Kayser Bill's own dirty Dutch now. When you sing in Muscatine, Iowa, Little Rock, Arkansas, or Sacramento, California, you'd better do 'em in English. But in little old New York—sing 'em in German!"

Mrs. Loamford became more and more astonished at the vocabulary and the manner of Hamilton Harper. This was a curious person to put in charge of a concert. Was Mr. Maxwell trying to fob them off by turning them over to this loud-mouthed, profane individual?

"Our Little Girl"

"Mr. Harper," she asked, "do you generally take charge of concerts?"

"Generally, Madame?" he returned. "Always! Yes, I've been in this game for twenty-three years now. I can remember when Joe Hofmann was a kid piano player and when Kreisler was a baby prodigy. I've put on some pretty big shows here, all right."

Mrs. Loamford wondered what she ought to say.

"Now, about this program," continued Harper, "make that last group light and effective. Hand 'em something they can sink their teeth in. Give 'em a tune. A lot of singers have been peddling this damn modern stuff till it gives you one wonderful pain to listen to it. It's all right, I suppose. A lot of ginks jumped on old Dick Wagner when he put on his operas. But if you're giving a recital for an average audience, remember it's full of low-down rough-necks like me."

"My daughter," said Mrs. Loamford, "knows many melodious songs by very good composers."

"Well, that's what I call good news! Just put 'em on the program, little lady."

Harper pressed a button on the desk and the pretty stenographer entered.

"Listen, Classy," he said. "Go into the press coop and dig Tommy out, if he's not too busy."

"Now," he resumed, "make up that program and get it down here tomorrow or the day after, so we can get up a little circular. Shoot me a tintype of yourself so we can get a cut made for the circular. Who's playing the piano for you?"

"We hadn't selected anyone," said Mrs. Loamford.

"Well, I guess you want a good young pianist," ventured Harper. "Some fellow who can make the old box stand up when you're singing."

"Couldn't we use one of the young women who studied with my daughter at the conservatory?"

"Dangerous, lady, dangerous. Better have a man, for the first recital, anyhow. Somebody like young Goldstein."

"He played for my daughter at Mr. Fleming's. I can't say he impressed me——"

"Hell, you don't want anybody to impress you!"

Mrs. Loamford stiffened. Harper noted the reaction.

"Pardon my French, Mrs. Loamford," he apologized. "You get that way when you've been in this game so long. What I mean is just this—get a fellow who can play the piano like Goldstein. But don't get one of those tricky virtuosos who try to hog the works. Goldstein's played for a lot of good people. He's steady and he knows the game. Of course, if you don't want him——"

"Well, if you think so, Mr. Harper——"

"You bet I think so," he affirmed pleasantly. "We'll fix that up right now. DeWitt Goldstein at the piano. Are you tied to any particular make of piano? If you know Fleming, I suppose you'll use one of his lizzies."

On the edge of the "Snappygram" he wrote "Champion Piano."

Classy came in, followed by Tommy.

"Ah!" bellowed Harper. "Here's the old dirt dispenser."

Dorothy was startled momentarily. Tommy didn't seem like the slightly literary, sentimental, would-be amorist she had known. He looked a bit drawn and she noticed for the first time that his hair was retreating perceptibly from his forehead and that there were faint touches of gray near the temples. He looked neat without an effort. His mouth seemed to be drawn in a firmer line than hitherto. Probably he had been working hard. There

"Our Little Girl"

was the merest hint of surprise in the glance which he directed at Dorothy. Apparently he had acquired poise.

"Here's a new subject for you, Tommy," said Harper. "Meet Miss Reitz. Miss Reitz, Mr. Borge, our press chief. He'll make you notorious."

"I know Miss L—Reitz," said Tommy in a voice which had deepened since Dorothy had last heard it. "I also know Mrs. Loamford."

"Hell, you know everybody!" exclaimed Harper. "You might as well lead 'em into your harem and get their confessions. Here's the dope on the recital."

He handed him the "Snappygram."

"You're safe with Mr. Borge," Harper confided to Dorothy. "He's pretty hard-boiled for one so young, but he'll land you in all the papers."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Harper."

"Don't mention it, Miss Reitz. Come in whenever we can help you. And don't forget that program and that picture. Good morning, Mrs. Loamford."

They followed Tommy into the Press Department office. It was a little room with three desks crowded together. Tommy went to his desk, nearest the window. It was covered with an untidy mass of clippings, magazines, newspapers, pictures and typewritten sheets. Another desk was occupied by Classy, who was typing nimbly and gracefully. A stout, pleasant-looking young woman was leaving the office.

"Just a moment, Miss Gray," commanded Tommy.

Miss Gray turned.

"I want you to meet Miss Reitz, who is singing at Aeolian on the second Saturday in October," he said. "And Mrs. Loamford. As soon as we get Miss Reitz's pictures put them put them through the rotos. Fix up a few captions about a young American soprano, trained

entirely in this country and let me see them sometime this afternoon. That's all, Miss Gray."

He waved Dorothy and Mrs. Loamford to chairs.

"So you're Miss Reitz, are you, Dot?" he observed reflectively.

"Mother thought——"

"Oh, all right. It'll make a better-looking ad. Reitz makes up small and we can give you a big display in a small space. Your advertising starts Sunday. Wait a minute."

He picked up the telephone.

"Get me Gorman."

He hung up again.

"I want your program tomorrow morning, so that we can get it in the racks at Aeolian quickly. Shoot me a picture for the rotos. Better give me three or four if you've got them. I know enough about your past to fix up a biography."

The bell rang. Tommy snatched the receiver.

"Gorman? Borge. Say, kid, I want to take ten lines, single on that ad for Sunday. Yes. It's another recital. Aeolian, second Saturday in October. See what date that is and put it in. The heroine's name is Reitz—R-E-I-T-Z—Reitz. It means charm in German. For Christ's sake don't advertise her as Charm. First name, Dorothy, orthodox spelling. Champion piano. Usual prices on tickets. Spend two-fifty on her and send me a schedule. That's all, Gorman."

Dorothy didn't understand this conversation literally, but she was even more puzzled by the apparent metamorphosis of Tommy. She had never heard him speak briskly and sharply. He was almost dynamic. Had he come under the influence of Harper? More than that, his manner betrayed no feeling for her. It wasn't so long

"Our Little Girl"

ago that he had been close to a proposal. Had he recovered from his affection for her? It would mean that he wouldn't annoy her any longer with insinuating declarations of passion, but she didn't altogether like the idea of having a man who once had made love to her treat her as though she were simply another cog in his professional machine.

Tommy lit his familiar pipe and took up his telephone again.

"*Musical Cosmos*—Miss Weatherby."

"Are you very busy here, Tommy?" asked Dorothy.

She would make a dignified exit.

"Busy? No, madame, this is my lunch hour. You ought to see this place when——"

The bell.

"This you, Betty? Yes, Tommy. Two things. One: put on your come-and-kiss-me hat and call for me about one and maybe I'll pay for my lunch as well as yours. Two: I'm sending you a picture of a new acquisition. Professional, I mean. You're my only social diversion, Betty. Her name's Dorothy Reitz. She sings soprano at Aeolian Hall next month. I wish you'd run in an interview before the recital. Ring her up at Schuyler 9716. Oh, she's decorative enough, Betty. Nothing to make you jealous, kid. I'd tell you more but she's here now. See you later."

"Well," he continued, "your picture goes into the *Musical Cosmos*. Miss Weatherby will ring you up for an interview. Tell her about the interesting new songs you have, why flappers do or don't, or why camels play chess. Anything you like, but make it entertaining. If you don't, she will. I don't know what Eggs has planned for you——"

"Who's Eggs?" interrupted Dorothy.

"The big boss. Harper's known as 'Ham' so I call Maxwell 'Eggs.' Any bill-of-fare will tell you why. I guess that's all for this hearing."

Mrs. Loamford rose.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Borge," she remarked. "It's very kind of you to take such an interest."

"It's not," said Tommy. "I'm paid for it. We give our clients pretty good service in this department. Now, Dot, don't be scared of Miss Weatherby. She's a ferociously attractive young woman, but she has a remarkable bean. We always try to start off interviews with her because she's a sympathetic sort. You'll get some real hot piccolo players later, but Betty's a good kid."

The vulgarian in him still manifested himself, Dorothy thought. However, he had had sense enough never to talk to her in the style which he adopted for Miss Gray's benefit.

"Piccolo players?" demanded Mrs. Loamford.

"Perhaps one of your daughter's intimate gentlemen friends will be glad to furnish a glossary for that epithet," explained Tommy. "As far as I'm concerned, you can use it as a generic term meaning unpleasant personalities."

The bell again.

"Who? What does she look like? A queen? Tell her to wait a minute."

Vulgar. Not a doubt of it.

"I'm afraid we're taking up your time," observed Mrs. Loamford.

"It's a lady to see me, says the chief houri of the switchboard. We'll let her wait."

"No—we mustn't detain you, Mr. Borge. Thank you so much!"

Mrs. Loamford pressed his hand effusively.

"It's awfully good of you, Tommy," concurred Dorothy.

"Our Little Girl"

She held out her hand. Tommy took it in a desultory way and hardly looked after her as she left the office. She felt slightly depressed. She didn't care about Tommy but she didn't like to think that she had lost a certain hold on him.

As Dorothy passed through the reception room she saw a small, plump but alluring girl with unusually black bobbed hair which forced itself out in neat waves from under an attractive red hat. She heard the switchboard impresario tell the girl that Mr. Borge would see her now, second door to the right, where it says "Press Department."

Dorothy was abstracted as she followed her mother to the elevators. She tried to adjust mentally her conception of Tommy and her relationship to him. Tommy had been reputed clever at college some four years ago. Arnold at one time had hailed Tommy as a remarkably brilliant youth. Then Arnold's opinion seemed to change. He regarded Tommy as bright but sloppy and conceited. Gradually the references to Tommy's sloppiness had disappeared in favor of reflections on Tommy's ego. Dorothy wondered whether she had not always looked on Tommy through Arnold's eyes. Yet Tommy had been attentive to her. Tommy was not wealthy, but his family was considered well-to-do. He had sufficient money for the usual routine of entertainment, although he had never taken her to some of the more expensive dancing emporia. He was pleasant. He tried to do things for her. She never, she admitted, had shown much gratitude for his efforts. Tommy, she reflected, had really given her a start by referring her to Fleming. Possibly he had even mentioned her to Maxwell.

But why should she think so much of Tommy? She had long since formed her estimate of him—a bright,

sloppy, conceited, rather vulgar young man. At least, he would be vulgar if you let him. He had made no particular impression on her emotions. And yet today—he seemed to have something that she liked, something—

It was the something that she missed in Arnold. Arnold never quite commanded a situation, and she liked to have a man command a situation. Tommy, in his official capacity, showed amazing executive powers. Had she misjudged him? Or why was it that she was able to subdue his none too violent attempts to make love to her? Did he treat Miss Weatherby in this fashion? And the pretty little dark girl in the outer office? Of course, in a business way, he would meet many attractive women. Had they diverted him from her? Was she growing jealous about a man for whom she had had something resembling an aversion? Perhaps it was the presence of her mother that had led him to treat her so casually. Perhaps he was trying to forget. That was a pleasing thought.

Yet why should she consider Tommy so seriously now?

"Watch out when you cross the street!"

Her mother spoke sharply.

"What are you dreaming about, Dorothy? Even if you see yourself as a famous singer, don't forget you're crossing the street."

The voice softened.

"At that, I don't blame you. I wish I were young and looking forward to what you're looking forward to."

"What did you say, mother?"

XI

SWEET ARE THE USES OF PUBLICITY

Dorothy's reflections on the sudden and violent change in the demeanor of Tommy came to an end before evening. Arnold's automobile stopped before 137 West 88th Street and its owner marched up the stairs to the door, whistling whatever he could remember of "Dardanella" jauntily yet sentimentally. Dorothy was delighted to see Arnold. He was a dependable sort. He wasn't fearfully smooth, like Maxwell, or fearfully rough, like Harper or—like Tommy. She didn't feel at home in the offices of the Underwood Concert Corporation. Things happened too rapidly for comfort. You spoke to Maxwell, who seemed more interested in giving a lecture based on his experiences than in listening to you. Harper welcomed you in a boisterous way, and amiably but decisively imposed his will on you. Even Tommy, who never had been a difficult problem socially, became distant and mysteriously breezy professionally. Then there were such people as Elsie Freron—but she wouldn't have to have anything to do with that woman. She looked positively disgusting. Dorothy disliked Maxwell's way of calling the Freron woman "Elsie." It was too intimate.

"Come out for a little spin and I'll tell you great news!" invited Arnold.

"But don't be away too long because we have to have a talk with Uncle Elliott later on," added Mrs. Loamford. "Muffle up well," she added in a warning way. "Remember you have to take care of your voice now."

Arnold looked at Dorothy questioningly.

Sweet Are the Uses of Publicity

"I'm going to make my *début* at Aeolian Hall," explained Dorothy, "on the second Saturday in October."

"Great!" exclaimed Arnold. "You can bet I'll be there."

He placed a blanket over Dorothy and started the car.

"What I wanted to tell you," he said, as they cut through Eighty-eighth Street to Riverside Drive, "is that I'm going in for myself."

"How wonderful!"

"Well, I had to do it. You can't get anywhere working on a salary, although I got a lot of raises down there this year. A lot of men would be satisfied to keep on going for what I've been getting, but that's not my way. I'm looking ahead. I want to have an income big enough so I can do—well, anything. So I quit today."

He noted Dorothy's startled look with pleasure.

"Yes, I quit today," he repeated. "Mr. Goldberg—that's the president of the firm, you know—said, 'I don't like to see you doing this,' and I said, 'I know, Mr. Goldberg, but I'm thinking about the future.' 'Arnold, my boy,' he said, 'you've got a great future here. You know that.' 'I do, Mr. Goldberg,' I said, 'but I want to branch out for myself. You'd do the same thing, too, if you were in my place.' Well, he talked a little more, but he saw the way I felt about it, so he said all right, he wouldn't stand in my way. 'Arnold,' he said, 'I wish you all the luck in the world.' 'And don't forget this,' he said, 'if you ever feel like coming back, there'll be room for you right here.' Well, I was sorry to leave, but I couldn't stay there all my life, so I left."

He made a sudden turn to avoid a bus.

"Well, what I'm going to do now," he went on, "is be a bond-trader. That's where the big money is on the Street. It takes a little nerve, but it's a sure thing if you know the ropes, and I guess I know the ropes about as well as

"Our Little Girl"

anybody down there. I know fellows making a thousand dollars a day sometimes with only an hour's work. Some of them aren't bright, either. You've got to know the ropes, that's all. I tried it out on my own last month, and——"

For the rest of the ride, which took them to 157th Street and back, Dorothy learned about corporate securities.

"——and I feel sorry for the fellows who keep on working for somebody else all their lives," Arnold concluded, as he brought his car up at 137 West 88th Street. "Some of them make good money, but I can make more working where I please, and take a good long vacation or a little run over to Europe—well, here you are."

Dorothy thanked him for the lovely ride.

"Take you out again tomorrow, if you like," he offered.

"I'm afraid I'll have to work on my program all the time until my recital," she said. "But——"

She considered.

"Let me take you wherever you want to go in the morning," he suggested.

"I have to go to the Underwood office at ten."

"The typewriter people?"

"The concert bureau."

"I'll be here at nine forty-five. All right?"

"It'll be lovely of you. But won't it be too much trouble?"

"No trouble at all. Nine forty-five tomorrow."

A good friend, thought Dorothy, as the car swung about and headed for Broadway. And he had more of that "something" than she had suspected.

Dorothy selected one of her most charming dresses for her visit to the managers. Arnold gazed on her approvingly.

Sweet Are the Uses of Publicity

"You're getting prettier every day," he commented. "You ought to be a real hit. Josie McNair told me——"

"Who?"

"Josephine McNair. She's in musical comedy. Thought I told you about her. I met her at lunch with one of the boys. A very nice girl in her way. She lives with her mother. She does—she does a little business with us. So I've seen her now and then. She says she hasn't enough voice for concert, but she's sure she'd make a hit if she had because if you look good all the critics fall for you. Look at Farrar. Personally, I don't know why they make so much fuss about her or any of those opera singers, but opera's something I don't care much about. I get pretty tired some days, working all day, and I like tunes. I don't mind a good concert now and then, though."

He pointed out a billboard.

"That's where Josie sings. Haven't seen it? I'll take you sometime. Just let me know when you want to go and I'll fix it so we get the best seats in the house."

"Has she a big part?"

"Well—not very big—yet. I hear she's going into the lead later on. She understudies now."

"She's in the chorus?"

"Well, she sings with the chorus to learn the routine, but she's not a chorus girl, although some chorus girls are very nice. I know one who supports a brother in college——"

"You know quite a few, don't you?"

Arnold's familiarity with such people wasn't so nice.

"I know some theatrical people—yes. One meets all kinds of people in Wall Street, you know."

"They must pay pretty well in the chorus."

Arnold looked up sharply.

"Our Little Girl"

"I'm not—intimate with any of them," he explained quickly. "I have to see some of them in a business way,"

He lapsed into silence.

"I don't really go with Josie —Miss McNair," he remarked suddenly, as he stopped his car at the building which contained the house of Underwood. "I just know her—well, in a friendly way."

"The office is on the tenth floor," said Dorothy.

"Shall I go with you?"

"You must have things to do this morning."

"Not a thing. I'll be glad to go with you, if you——"

"All right. It's very nice of you, only I don't want to keep you from anything you ought to do."

He entered the elevator with Dorothy.

"I won't be long," she said.

"No hurry. We can have lunch afterwards."

The proprietress of the switchboard greeted them cordially.

"Mr. Borge left word you were to see him when you came," she said. "Wait a minute—I'll see if he's busy,"

Tommy evidently wasn't busy.

Dorothy opened the door to the Press Department and found Tommy at his desk in consultation with Miss Gray.

"Hello, Arnold," snapped out Tommy, as he observed Dorothy's companion. "Are you giving a recital, too?"

Arnold acknowledged the salutation with a flapping of the hand.

"Got your program and your pictures?" demanded Tommy.

Dorothy placed a long blue sheet of paper and a few photographs on his desk. Tommy glanced quickly at the photographs. He picked up two and tossed them across the desk to Miss Gray.

"Have ten of each copied," he ordered. "And get them

Sweet Are the Uses of Publicity

around as soon as you can. By the way, meet Mr. Deering. He's not Miss Reitz's husband."

Dorothy looked uncomfortable. Tommy was too fresh. Arnold bowed to Miss Gray. Tommy handed the remaining pictures to Dorothy.

"Try these on your piano," he suggested.

"I always liked this one," demurred Dorothy, pointing out a view of herself reflected in a mirror.

"I don't doubt it," retorted Tommy, "only, you'll find it difficult to impress editors with it. They simply have no taste!"

Miss Gray laughed. The laugh irritated Dorothy. It was a verdict for Tommy as against her.

"Miss Gray knows," added Tommy. "Miss Gray—tell Mr. Deering what Mr. Eaton or Mr. Johnston or Mr. Torrey would say about that picture."

He held it up and smiled pityingly.

"So much for pictures," continued Tommy. "Let's see the program."

"I thought Mr. Harper wanted to see it."

"He will—after we get through with it."

He inspected the blue sheet with a quizzical grin.

"Well, it's your recital," he murmured, a little unpleasantly.

"Isn't it all right?" asked Dorothy anxiously. "I made it up with Madame Graaberg."

Tommy tossed it to Miss Gray.

"If you think the same as I do," he said, "don't say anything."

Miss Gray returned it.

"I think the same as you do," she remarked pleasantly. "But it's a perfectly safe program."

"Look here, Dot," said Tommy abruptly. "Are you coaching for this recital?"

"Our Little Girl"

His manner captured her attention.

"Why—I'm practising."

"No—I mean coaching."

"No—ought I?"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea. We can let this program ride. But it'll help you a lot to go over it with some competent coach."

"Won't Madame Graaberg do?"

"She might. I'd take somebody bigger. Say Soedlich."

"But they say——"

The suggestion was grateful, but Tommy mustn't command her!

"They say a lot. Listen, my dear young woman: You're old enough to take care of yourself. If you feel timid about going to Soedlich's studio alone, you might take brother Arnold with you."

Dorothy had nothing to say for a moment. Tommy never had addressed her as "my dear young woman" in the old days. He had been almost obsequious. His present attitude was hardly nice. Probably the influence of Harper. And the reference to Arnold was anything but nice.

Tommy handed the program to Miss Gray.

"Get out a leaflet," he said. "Make it pretty. You've got a good subject this time."

"Ought I to see Mr. Maxwell?" inquired Dorothy.

Tommy took up his telephone.

"The boss," he said. "Say, Mr. Maxwell, you don't want to see Miss Reitz now, do you?"

He replaced the receiver.

"You needn't see him," he concluded. "Now you'd better get hold of Soedlich and go over the program with him. Harper's made arrangements with Goldstein to accompany you. You'll hear from him. Your recital starts at three. And now you know everything."

Sweet Are the Uses of Publicity

He rose and took his hat and coat from a rack.

"You'll pardon me," he said. "Miss Gray can take care of anything you need. Miss Gray, please entertain Miss Reitz and Mr. Deering. I'm going over to the Met to have a talk with Bill Guard. Good-bye, Arnold. S'long, Dot."

He marched out, lighting a cigarette.

Dorothy and Arnold bade Miss Gray a pleasant morning and made their way to the elevators.

"Isn't he the most conceited goof you ever saw?" asked Arnold indignantly.

"He seemed to be a little queer. He's changed since he's been with the concert bureau."

"He was always conceited."

"He may have been, but——"

"You used to see a good deal of him, didn't you?"

"Oh, he called now and then; that was all."

"He liked you, didn't he?"

Dorothy shrugged her shoulders. Was Arnold jealous?

"Well, let's take a little spin."

It was pleasant, riding around with Arnold. He was sympathetic. He knew nice places to visit. He was a good dancer. He was very nice.

Tommy's advice about Soedlich lingered with Dorothy. Her mother, she knew, would raise a terrible ado if she ever imagined that her daughter was going to the studio of "that man." Yet Soedlich's reputation was enormous. She had noticed a small announcement in the *Musical Cosmos*, listing some of the singers who had coached with Soedlich in the past year. The catalogue was long and included almost all of the current concert celebrities. There was no doubt that Dorothy ought to coach with Soedlich. But what would mother say?

Mother would say nothing, Dorothy decided. Mother

"Our Little Girl"

would not know. She telephoned to Soedlich's studio from a drugstore booth.

A languid female voice identified itself as Mr. Soedlich's secretary. Mr. Soedlich had little time free. Who was this? Did Mr. Soedlich know her? She was recommended by the Underwood Concert Corporation? A week from today at 6:30 in the evening was the only open time. No; there was positively no other time available. No; it would be no use to let them know later. The time probably would be taken up by then. Very good. The name again, please? Miss R-E-I-T-Z. A week from today at 6:30. Thank you.

Dorothy spent several hours daily rehearsing with the monosyllabic Goldstein. He charged little for his services and he played better than any accompanist she had ever had. Now and then he would suggest a transposition to bring a song within her best range. He was impersonal and agreeable. He knew his business and he knew his place. There should have been more men like him in the concert field.

The Press Department sent her an envelope of leaflets containing her picture and her program. She was pleased with the announcement. She shoved it into the frame of her boudoir mirror. It was a good-looking leaflet. Her picture had come out beautifully. Oughtn't she to phone Tommy and thank him? She didn't know. Probably just as good not to. She put a few in one of her buff envelopes and sent them anonymously to Arnold. He'd like to see them.

Mrs. Loamford bestowed unqualified approval on the leaflet.

"I looked like that at your age," she smiled.

She held up the printed sheet and admired it at arm's length.

Sweet Are the Uses of Publicity

“‘Recital of Songs by Dorothy Reitz, soprano,’” she read. “‘DeWitt Goldstein at the piano. Champion piano. Seats fifty cents to two dollars. Boxes fifteen dollars. Plus ten per cent tax. Now at box office.’”

She kissed Dorothy.

“At last!” she exclaimed. “At last!”

Her enthusiasm mounted on Sunday, when Uncle Elliott showed her the amusement section of the *Times*. Mrs. Loamford and her brother read aloud in unison the copy which had been inserted.

<p>Recital of Songs by <i>Dorothy</i> REITZ Soprano Tickets 55c to \$2.20. Now at Box Office. (Champion piano) Mgt. Underwood Concert Corp.</p>

Arnold telephoned to announce that he had discovered an item about Dorothy in the *Tribune*. All crowded about the receiver to hear him read it.

“‘Dorothy Reitz, a young American soprano,’” came Arnold’s voice, “‘will be heard in a program of songs at Aeolian Hall two weeks from Saturday.’”

Mrs. Loamford immediately sent out for a dozen copies of the *Tribune*.

“And tomorrow,” she added, “we’ll get a scrap-book—and a big one, too!”

Early Monday morning arrived Miss Weatherby from the *Musical Cosmos*. She was a singularly lovely girl. Her complexion was so fresh and ruddy that Dorothy suspected her of cosmetics, but a close scrutiny betrayed

"Our Little Girl"

nothing. Miss Weatherby was obviously in haste.

"I have to see Fritz Kreisler this morning," she explained, "and I'm to have an early luncheon with some Metropolitan singers. However, if I didn't get here to-day, I wouldn't have been able to get you into the *Cosmos* for this week, and Mr. Borge was so very anxious to have an interview with you before your recital that I just hurried in."

Dorothy expected Miss Weatherby to produce a notebook and a pencil, but there were no symptoms of these aids.

"Shall I get you some note-paper?" suggested Dorothy.

"Oh, I never take notes," laughed Miss Weatherby. "Mr. Borge told me a great deal about you. He certainly knows his artists. You're most fortunate to have him handling your publicity. He's wonderful! Our editor says that if all press agents wrote like Mr. Borge, he'd fire all the staff and turn the paper over to the press agents. I sometimes wonder why a brilliant man like Mr. Borge stays with a concert bureau. He's wasted there. But do you know—he's considered the cleverest publicity man in the musical field and I think he's the youngest, too.

"Now, Mr. Borge told me all about you and your family and where you studied, and I have your program and your picture. Now, is there anything you'd like to say particularly?"

"Why—I don't know——"

She should have said something clever, but Miss Weatherby's animation unnerved her.

Miss Weatherby pulled down a fetching turban somewhat more snugly over her smooth, copper-colored hair.

"I think people like to read about personality," she said, "and I think I've got a pretty good idea of yours. Mr. Borge told me all about it. I sometimes think he can

Sweet Are the Uses of Publicity

see right through people, but he's so modest, he won't talk about it. He once took me to a vaudeville show—I suppose you think that's terribly lowbrow, but I like it—and there was a dancing team. They were working very hard, but there wasn't any applause. Tom—Mr. Borge turned to me and said, 'If they'll continue that whirl they're doing till they reach the footlight, they'll get a hand.' Sure enough—before he'd hardly finished what he was saying, the team did just that and the audience applauded. He's got a wonderful sense of such things. That's why he's so valuable to Mr. Maxwell. I don't know what they'd do without him over there.

"But really, I mustn't take up any more of your time. Thank you so much. I hope we'll meet again, and I wish you a most successful recital. I've enjoyed meeting you a lot."

Before Dorothy was aware of it, Miss Weatherby had vanished.

She wondered what sort of interview Miss Weatherby would make of this conversation. The interviewer had done all of the talking. And all about Tommy Borge. So Tommy was a great man! And modest! Well——

Tuesday brought a short item in the *Globe*, announcing a recital by Dorothy Reitz. Uncle Elliott brought three copies of the paper with him.

"That's the stuff!" he said. "Keep your name before the public. How much do you think we appropriate annually for advertising? You'd fall dead if I told you! Keep on pounding in the name of your product and the public will ask for it. That's the best business principle I know. It doesn't matter what you're selling. You can put a concert over just as well as you can move a line of fedora hats, if you get behind it and push. People have seen the name of Reitz so much that when they think of

a man's hat they think of Reitz. It's the same way with a concert. When they see 'Dorothy Reitz' often enough, they know it. Then, when they think of music, they think of Dorothy Reitz."

He chewed his cigar viciously.

"Yes, ma'am!" he concluded. "Keep your name before the public—and you'll sell 'em!"

As Dorothy was riding home from Madame Graaberg's studio the next day, she noticed a familiar picture in an evening paper which a girl opposite her in the car was reading. She bent over to examine the picture. It was a large photograph of herself. Across the top of it she could read the headline:

HAT KING'S NIECE TO BE DIVA

She was stunned for a moment. She tried to read the few lines of black type below the picture, but the owner of the paper turned to another page.

Dorothy left the car at the nearest news-stand and bought a copy of the paper.

She crumpled the paper in finding the page from which her photograph greeted the world.

HAT KING'S NIECE TO BE DIVA

Here it was. It was a good picture of her, too.

She scanned the black type:

"From lids to Liszt is a big jump, but charming Dorothy Reitz has done it. Miss Reitz, who is the niece of Elliott Reitz, the hat king, is soon to make her New York début in concert. Her recital, it is rumored, will be unlike her famous uncle's product: it will not go over the heads of the audience."

Dorothy folded the paper together angrily. So this was

Sweet Are the Uses of Publicity

how the newspapers treated the efforts of dignified artists! A commercial note was run into her concert plans. She would see that a retraction was published. Everyone would read this. Everyone would read this . . . perhaps it might attract an audience.

Her mother fumed for ten minutes over the picture, and then sent out for twenty extra copies of the paper. Arnold telephoned excitedly. The telephone kept ringing all afternoon. Apparently everyone had seen the picture. Her mother's friends cried out that they were thrilled—positively thrilled to see Dorothy's picture in print. They were sure that everyone would want to hear the recital now.

Dorothy felt that everyone who passed the house would point up and say, "Yes, that's where the hat king's niece, the singer, lives." Although only her mother was about, she felt unwontedly conspicuous. By the end of the afternoon, she had a formula for thanking her mother's friends who telephoned congratulations and who wanted to speak to the little diva.

Shortly before six, Uncle Elliott arrived.

"Look here!" he shouted as he entered. "Who did this?"

He waved a copy of the paper excitedly.

"Who did this?" he boomed ferociously. "What do you call this? How dare they——"

He stormed up the stairs into the sitting-room and thrust the paper on Mrs. Loamford.

"Isn't this the limit?" he cried. "This is smart—ah, that's smart. Why, I'll take this up with my lawyer. It makes me ridiculous!"

He noticed his sister edging to the table. His eyes followed her—and he saw twenty copies of the paper, with the picture displayed on each.

“Our Little Girl”

“That’s right!” he sneered. “Buy ’em all up. Next thing you’ll be sending ’em out to your friends!”

Dorothy suddenly laughed merrily.

“What’s funny about it?” he demanded, thumping the table. “What’s the joke? Tell me where the joke is!”

His voice dropped a trifle.

“I can take a joke as well as the next fellow, but——”

Suddenly he shouted again.

“It’s an outrage—that’s all. I don’t care who hears me. It’s a hell of a way to do things!”

XII

GUIDE, PHILOSOPHER AND—

It was a chance encounter with Rose Manning that brought to Dorothy a realization of the fact that fame in the concert world was not far away. Dorothy was emerging from Schirmer's on Forty-third Street, where she had journeyed in quest of "encore songs," when she almost ran into Rose, who was tripping eastward into the tea-dancing district on the arm of a young man who obviously went to Cornell. Rose disengaged herself from her escort and flung herself upon Dorothy with startling effusiveness.

"Why Dorothy Loamford!" she cried affectionately. "I haven't seen you in years! Where have you been keeping yourself? I guess you don't talk to us unimportant people any more, with a recital 'n' everything!"

Dorothy found herself returning Rose's kisses.

"Meet Mr. Schuster," said Rose, shoving forward the young man, who had been left to inspect the windows of the music shop. "This is Miss Reitz, who is singing in Aeolian Hall next week. We used to go to conservatory together but she's gone way ahead of poor little me. She's a real, honest concert singer. Wait till you hear her!"

Dorothy acknowledged Mr. Schuster's greeting.

"It sure is good to see you again, Dot," Rose rattled on. "I've often wondered when you'd make your debut. We all knew you'd be one of the big stars very soon. You can bet I'll be there! I'll make Mr. Schuster take me. He hates good music, but we'll show him—what, Dorothy?"

"I'll be very glad to come," said the abashed Mr. Schus-

"Our Little Girl"

ter, who began to wonder what function he had at this love feast.

"I always said you'd be the first one of us to make good," continued Rose. "It's simply wonderful to think that you're going to make your *début*! You must come and have tea with me real soon, Dot."

Dorothy remembered that a concert artist was a busy woman.

"I'll look up my engagements," she replied with no little dignity. "And when will we hear from you?"

"From me?"

Rose laughed and toddled about in a small circle.

"I haven't sung a note since I graduated. Maybe you'll hear from me in the Follies. But really, my folks simply won't let me go on the stage. Isn't that a crime?"

Mr. Schuster nudged Rose.

"Won't be any tables left," he muttered.

"Oh, you must excuse me!" exclaimed Rose, kissing Dorothy again. "I'm so sorry I kept you. Please ring me up real soon. We'll see you at the recital, anyhow. It was gorgeous to see you again. Goo'-bye, Dottie dear!"

Mr. Schuster slapped his hat by way of valedictory and continued down the street with Rose.

A short forecast of musical events in an evening paper also helped to show Dorothy where she belonged.

"An unusually busy week," it ran, "includes recitals by Josef Hofmann, Elly Ney, Bachaus, Fritz Kreisler, Efrem Zimbalist and Erika Morini, along with a good half-dozen *débutantes*. John McCormack will give the first of six recitals at the Hippodrome, and other vocalists to be heard include Emilio de Gogorza, Anna Case, and several newcomers, including Dorothy Reitz, who, by the way, is a niece of the celebrated hat impresario."

The reference to Uncle Elliott, thought Dorothy, was

a little unnecessary, but she noted with pleasure that she was the only new artist to be mentioned by name in the summary. She bought six copies of the paper.

Suddenly she recalled that she had an appointment with Soedlich at six-thirty. Her mother hadn't been satisfied with Dorothy's request that dinner be postponed until late. Why? Dorothy had an important engagement downtown. With whom? Did it matter? Yes, it certainly did matter! Well, it was about some music. Couldn't that be done just as well at some other time? No—Dorothy had to have it. Since when were the music stores open so late? It—it wasn't a music store; it was an engagement with Tommy—about publicity—very important.

Mrs. Loamford wanted to know why Dorothy took such pains with her coiffure for a visit to Tommy's office.

"We might go out to dinner," explained Dorothy.

"I wish you'd tell me exactly," expostulated her mother, "whether you're coming home to dinner or not. I expect Uncle Elliott and I don't intend to keep him waiting all night."

"Then don't wait for me," retorted Dorothy. "I guess Tommy'll take me out to dinner."

Soedlich's studio occupied the first floor of a house on Fiftieth Street, near Sixth Avenue. What had been a front parlor before the apartmental era had been divided into an office and a dressing-room. The dressing-room included a mirror, two chairs, and a couch. Soedlich's music-room occupied the space once devoted to a back parlor, and a pantry overlooking a cement backyard had been converted into a kitchenette.

Dorothy was surprised to observe that Soedlich's secretary, a thin, haughty spinster whom one would have expected to carry a lorgnette, and who did, was still on duty.

"Our Little Girl"

As Dorothy entered, the secretary consulted a diary.

"You are Miss Reitz? Mr. Soedlich will be ready for you presently. Take a seat."

As Dorothy sat in a battered, green plush-covered chair, old, but not antique, the stories that she had heard concerning Soedlich began to surge up. It was hard to reconcile these racy tales with the ponderous lecturer who had exasperated the students at St. Cecilia with his dull drawl—and yet they would not down. Had he really deserted his first wife, eloped with his second and fled to Europe to marry a third? Was it true that he held virtue inimical to *bel canto*? Were his coaching sessions really amorous episodes rather than instruction in the noble art of song?

The girls had told her some of these rumors, and her mother had not only dropped suggestions but thrown them at her forcibly. What would she do if Soedlich practised his fabled technique on her? Disposing of youths who showed an uncommon inclination to kiss or to hold hands was one thing. Evading the embraces of a sensual music master was something else. She would be alone with him in the studio. Studio! The word had a wanton sound. Of course, Madame Schneider had had a studio, but a woman's studio was distinct from a man's. It was always in the man's studio that The Thing Happened.

She found herself growing nervous. She fidgeted on the chair. She couldn't retreat now without making herself ridiculous before the secretary. She wondered what she could say to that dignitary that would make a loophole for escape.

The secretary, however, seemed to be little disposed to indulge in conversation. She disregarded Dorothy, and scratched away at a little mound of papers, which Dorothy decided was the last batch of monthly statements.

Two raucous buzzes near the desk caused the secretary to look up wearily.

"You can go in now."

Dorothy looked questioningly at the secretary for instructions.

"Go right through."

It was too late to withdraw. She would face Soedlich, But if he—

Dorothy passed through the dressing-room and found the door to the music-room open. Soedlich stood near the entrance and greeted her with a smile. She noticed that he wore a cutaway but there was still much of the unkempt, uncouth lecturer whom she had known at St. Cecilia's.

"Miss Reitz? How do you do?"

He put forward his hand and clasped Dorothy's.

"Let's have a little talk first," he suggested.

He sat beside her on a cozy sofa. Dorothy was surprised that a man so careless of his appearance should have so neat and so delicately designed a studio. An ebony grand piano, draped in a glittering orange cover, took up one corner of the room. There was a little desk near the door and a large cabinet along one wall. Instead of the conventional wall lights or chandeliers there were four large golden lamps, on slender pedestals. The light was diffused and the atmosphere was intimately silky.

"So you are almost ready for your recital," remarked Soedlich.

Dorothy heard in his ordinarily drab voice lyric overtones which had been absent or unnoticed when he discussed the life of Verdi.

"You have your program?"

"I'm sorry—I forgot to bring it."

Soedlich chuckled.

"Our Little Girl"

"It won't be necessary," he said. "I have it here."

He took the Underwood leaflet from the piano.

"Shall we go through it now?" he asked, "or would you care to have a little supper with me first?"

"A little supper" was a dangerous thing.

"Why—I think I'd like to go over it now," she decided discreetly.

"Very good."

He went to the piano and struck several chords softly. His touch was precise and delicate. Dorothy had heard that Soedlich had been a popular accompanist before he had given up all of his time to coaching.

She sang her first song for him, wishing all the time that Soedlich were to be at the piano for her at her recital.

"Not bad at all, my dear, he commented, "but why do you hold your head so high when you sing? Give your pretty throat a chance, my child."

He placed his hands over her hair.

"Like this."

He moved her head gently.

"Now sing it again from that position."

Dorothy repeated the song.

"That was so much better. Your Italian diction is remarkably good for an American. Do you speak Italian?"

"I studied it at the conservatory, but I can't speak it."

"That's a pity. One can say so many things in Italian that cannot be said in any other language. You should learn it."

He turned to her next song.

"Pergolese," he remarked. "A good old stand-by. But how few sing it well!"

He played the introduction.

Dorothy sang "Se tu m'ami," as Madame Graaberg had taught it to her.

"That is good singing," commented Soedlich, "but it is no more than that. Do you know what the words mean?"

"Something about being faithful."

Soedlich smiled, and stroked her hand.

"You do not know the nuances of Italian," he said. "The English translation you have here is 'something about being faithful.' It must have been written by a very good man who loved his wife and had many, many children. It's a fair translation of some of the words—but Anglo-Saxons do not always understand these things. If you knew exactly what this song meant, you would sing it so much better——"

He patted her cheeks and laughed. Dorothy didn't like his familiarity.

"Or perhaps you would not sing it at all. The meaning, my child, is this: 'Good sir, if you would but love me'—which does not mean 'if you would kiss me,' but something much more interesting—you must show your passion more directly. In other words, the lady is inviting the gentleman to take her by force. It is a delightful song—a little improper, perhaps, and therefore all the more fascinating. It amuses me so when I hear nice young women sing it as though it were just an exercise in legato."

He turned to the piano.

"Now, we shall do it again. This time, my dear, forget about tone production. That will come naturally. Sing it to me, as though you wished to arouse me!"

He stopped playing.

"But perhaps you do not wish to arouse me."

Dorothy began to suspect that the intangible rumors about Soedlich's private life probably had good foundations. Was he trying to flirt with her? Or was he making veiled advances? She looked at the piano moodily.

"Our Little Girl"

Dignity would show him that she was no silly girl who had come to be petted.

"Why so serious?" he asked. "I do not mean that you must arouse me—Michel Soedlich—do not think of me as the man in the case. Think of the man you love best and sing as though you wished to stir him to action."

This was too bold. What right had Soedlich to assume that there was any man she loved best? However, his idea of interpretation probably was right. She repeated the song with archness.

Soedlich left the piano.

"No! no! no!" he cried. "You are flirting with him, but if he did what you asked him to you would run home and tell your mother. You have missed the idea."

He advanced toward her. Why did he have to do that? He put a hand on her shoulder. She wouldn't permit it. She wrenched herself free. If he tried anything like that again she would leave.

Soedlich smiled.

"What did you think I was going to do?" he inquired mildly. "Don't hunch your shoulders when you sing. How can you breathe that way?"

A lame excuse, Dorothy thought.

"Now, let us try that song again—but really, if you act so contrary, we will never get through the program."

Program? What program? Was there something extra-musical in his meaning?

The repetition brought an approving nod from Soedlich.

"That was better," he said. "That is how you should sing everything. Not so much here"—he pointed to the throat—"and more here"—he indicated the heart. "Let us go on."

She sang an Italian stand-by which had served singers for several hundred years. She did it pretty well, she

thought. Madame Graaberg always had complimented her on the performance of this selection.

Soedlich, however, seemed far from impressed.

"Sit down," he said.

What would follow this invitation?

She sank into the couch, and Soedlich sat beside her.

"My dear child," he remarked, "you do not need so much instruction in the mechanics of singing as a talk on interpretation. You are like a princess who is still asleep."

It was decidedly a dubious speech. Dorothy sought the far corner of the couch. Soedlich looked at her steadily.

"Are you afraid that I will eat you?" he asked, gently.

He arose and walked up and down in front of her. What would he do next? She was sorry that she had come. She had imagined a session with Soedlich to be something rather exciting, but this was only a series of uncomplimentary comments. He treated her like a child; and she was certain that if she would permit it, he would fondle her as he would paw over a very young girl. She remembered Rose Manning's line about "pash lips." It made her uncomfortable. The room, with its voluptuous hangings and its subdued lighting, had an air of seduction about it. And why the cutaway?

Soedlich resumed his place on the couch. Dorothy observed that he seemed to smirk a trifle as he deliberately placed himself as far away from her as he could. Had she shown him her attitude on such matters? Or was he preparing for some strange amorous strategy?

"Tell me," he said, "about your philosophy of life. I think that is what is wrong with your singing."

An indirect opening for intimacies! Dorothy warded it off with a look of non-comprehension.

"You do not understand? I was afraid that you might not."

"Our Little Girl"

He was insulting her intelligence as well!

"How you sing," he continued, "depends greatly on how you live and how you think. Anyone who knows a few tricks can teach you how to make beautiful tones—if you have a voice. You have a voice. Perhaps not a great voice, but a good voice. Many great singers have had no better. But it is your outlook on life that interests me more than your voice. Which interests you more—another person or yourself?"

Stupid question. Soedlich was a coach of singing. Why did he ask her, "Which interests you more?"

"I don't know what you mean," she answered, and her tone said that she considered the question beside the point.

"Let me put it differently. Have you ever searched your own heart? Have you ever searched the heart of a friend?"

"Do you mean, do I understand people?"

She didn't like the mockery in his eyes.

"Not exactly, but it will do."

"Yes. I think I do understand people."

That ought to be an end to it.

"Then you ought to put that understanding into your singing. When you sing a song about a young lady whose lover is too shy, you must, for the time, be that young lady and you must feel like a young lady who wishes the embraces of her timid lover. Do you understand?"

And Soedlich, she supposed, would like to be that lover.

"If I may be frank, my dear young lady," he went on, "I think that your mind is too much on yourself and on how you are singing. Have you ever heard Chaliapin in 'Boris' or have you ever heard Schumann-Heink sing 'Der Erlkönig'? If you have, you will understand. You are too young to have heard Calvé as 'Carmen,' but she was 'Carmen,' not Calvé. You, my dear, are always

Miss Reitz. And when you sing a song of enticement, you should be an enchantress."

He moved over and patted her hand gently.

"Now, do you understand?"

Yes, but why did he have to pat her hand? He was using this theoretical talk as a pretext for making love to her.

"There is more to it. Great singing may be founded on mere understanding, on knowing the souls of men and women. But it is rooted in human experience. You must have human experience, my child, before you can become a great artist."

Dorothy rose. She knew what he meant by "human experience." In a moment he would be offering to supply her with this commodity. He was making improper advances to her.

"I must go," she said. "I have an appointment."

Soedlich clenched his fists in exasperation.

"How can I teach you anything if you run away before I have started?"

"I'm very sorry, but I must go."

She would be firm with him.

"Well," he said resignedly, "it's as you please. I don't think that I've been able to help you very much. Do you wish to come again?"

No! He wasn't what she needed. Goldstein was of more use. So was Madame Graaberg.

"I'll let you know."

It was polite but final.

"Very well."

He opened the door, and walked out with her. He stopped at his secretary's desk and bade her good-bye.

"That's a funny girl," he observed to the secretary. "Do you know, I think she thought that I was trying to make love to her!"

XIII

—FRIEND

Within two hours, the brief session in Soedlich's studio was magnified to appear like a narrative out of a cheap magazine or a bit of gossip retailed by a joyous defamer. Soedlich wasn't so terrible, now that she was in her room, inspecting herself in the mirror. It would have been fun—in a way—to lead him on. She hadn't shown her usual poise. Dorothy was a little nettled over the way in which she had played her part. She wished that she were back in the studio, a newcomer to Soedlich's apartment. It would be so easy to stand him on his ear—now that she knew his methods. Probably Soedlich was laughing at her now. The conceited ass!

At that, it was Soedlich who had lost. She came to this conclusion as she surveyed her features in the mirror. She moved away so that she might examine herself at full length. She was pretty good to look at, even if she said it herself! She hunched up a shoulder and looked over it into the glass. It wasn't any wonder that Soedlich was interested. She needn't depend on voice alone! There weren't many singers who had her charms. A good back and shoulders, Dorothy, and lovely arms. Nice legs, Dorothy, and ankles——! You're pretty good, Dorothy!

Then she thought that she ought to drop in at the Underwood office in the morning. Perhaps something important had turned up. And yet she didn't want to go. Maxwell and Harper were pleasant enough, but they treated her like a child. As for Tommy—what had got into Tommy, anyhow?

At noon on Saturday, Arnold arrived in great excitement, carrying a pile of newspapers.

"Who's been doing your publicity?" he demanded, as he came into the sitting-room. "Look at this!"

He spread the papers on the table. They were open at the amusement pages. Dorothy looked at them eagerly, and the table seemed to be a mass of photographs of her. She saw her picture in the *Globe*, the *Sun* and the *Journal* and a large rotogravure in the *Evening Post*.

"It's wonderful!" cried Arnold.

Mrs. Loamford came in and noted the agitation. She bent over the papers ecstatically, and kissed Dorothy.

"Oh, how wonderful! How wonderful!" she almost screamed.

She turned to Arnold.

"You're so good to us!" she exclaimed. "Thank you so much for bringing all these papers."

Arnold put his arms about Dorothy's shoulders as they examined the photographs and read aloud the notes to the effect that Dorothy Reitz would give her first New York recital at Aeolian Hall on next Saturday afternoon. Dorothy didn't mind his embrace. Mrs. Loamford smiled on them proudly and bestowed an unspoken benediction.

"Let's celebrate," suggested Arnold. "Come out for a good long spin and tea."

Dorothy nodded eagerly.

"And you, Mother Loamford?" inquired Arnold, cordially but not urgently.

"You young folks will have a better time without me," she smiled, and tapped Arnold playfully on the shoulder. "You'll have more fun without the prima donna's mother."

She laughed uproariously at her pleasantry, and studied the papers with great zeal.

"Our Little Girl"

Early next morning Arnold came in again, burdened with the Sunday papers. The musical supplements were folded over and on the outside.

"Done it again, Dot!" he called out, as he raced up the stairs.

And it had been done again. The *Tribune*, the *World*, and the *Herald* had included Dorothy's picture in the lay-out of artists for the week. The *World* and the *Herald* had published rotogravure pictures. And the *Staats-Zeitung* had printed a long paragraph about Dorothy. Lena was summoned to translate it. It was perfectly lovely!

Uncle Elliott arrived with another set of Sunday papers.

"You've seen them?" he asked, with no little disappointment in his voice.

His dejection at not being the original bearer of the news passed quickly.

"Now that's my idea of how things ought to be done," he declared, punctuating his speech with cigar thrusts. "Put your name before the public. Let 'em know who you are and what you do. That's publicity. That's what makes successes. Who did this publicity for you?"

"The bureau, I suppose," Dorothy ventured.

"They've done a great piece of work," was Uncle Elliott's verdict. "By this time today, every man, woman and child in this city knows who Dorothy Reitz is. They've established your name. I'd like to meet their publicity man. There's a place for him in my organization any time he wants to come over."

"Mr. Borge is in charge of the press department," said Dorothy.

"Any relation to the fellow who used to call here?"

"It's—it's the same man."

"I always thought he was a bright young fellow. Well,

you tell him for me that he's a real publicity man, and if they don't treat him right down there, I'll give him a place to hang his hat."

Uncle Elliott's commendation of Tommy didn't please Dorothy. It was tactless to praise him in front of Arnold.

"Now look here, young woman. I want you to get me fifty tickets for your concert, and I'll see that they're sold. I'll make every mother's son down at the office buy a couple. It'll do 'em all good to hear some good music. Say, Deering, why don't you do the same?"

Arnold looked startled.

"Why—I—never thought of that. I'm not in an office, you know. I'm for myself."

"You don't need an office to sell tickets. When you go down to the Street tomorrow, just stop every fellow you know and make 'em take a couple. Tell 'em what a great girl Dorothy is. I guess you can do that, all right"—Uncle Elliott chuckled, vulgarly, Dorothy thought—"and they won't be able to resist it. They'll want to buy tickets. They'll fight for 'em. That's the spirit that gets things done!"

Arnold agreed to try.

"Don't try—just buck up and do it!" was Uncle Elliott's comment.

It was an agreeable day for Dorothy. Arnold was to stay for dinner, and he suggested a little walk along Broadway. They met several acquaintances who stopped and said "I see you're giving a recital" and "Saw your picture in the paper today." Dorothy would respond: "Oh, thank you so much! Yes, I *am* making my *début* next Saturday." And Arnold would add, "Of course, you'll be there," for which he always received a brilliant smile from Dorothy. They went out for tea in the afternoon,

"Our Little Girl"

and several of Arnold's friends stopped at their table to comment on the pictures and to wish Dorothy a great success. All vowed that they would be among those present at Aeolian Hall.

"I ought to have a good house," remarked Dorothy.

"It'll be wonderful," assented Arnold.

"And I'll have you to thank—for much of it," responded Dorothy, squeezing his hands warmly.

On Monday, Dorothy decided that the time had come for all good sopranos to go to the offices of their managers. They would look up to her now. She had been recognized.

Maxwell kept her waiting for twenty minutes. At the end of that time, Elsie Freron emerged from his office and stopped on her way out to greet Dorothy.

"My dear, you were in all the Sunday papers!" she announced. "I was thrilled! You must come over and see me sometime. Come to one of my little parties some evening. We have such a good time!"

She breezed out, as Maxwell stepped to the door and beckoned Dorothy to come in.

"You're to be congratulated on your publicity, Miss Reitz," he commented, as he sank into his chair.

"I thought it was very good."

"It was remarkable. I can remember a few instances like yours—but a very few. No one has ever had a better introduction to the public. I was telling Tommy Borge just before you came in that it was a triumph for his department. I take it you're pleased?"

"I'm delighted."

"I'm glad that you are. You might, if you cared to, drop a hint to that effect to the press department. Tommy has done wonders for you."

"I'll do that."

"Now, is there anything else I can do for you?"

"Was there anything you—was there anything——"

"I don't believe that I have to give you any farewell instructions before the recital. We've sent the bill to your mother, according to our arrangement. Incidentally, there's no special charge for this publicity, although if we billed it to you at newspaper space rates—I really must ask Tommy how much that space would have been worth."

He rose and patted her paternally.

"All you have to do now is to sing a beautiful recital," he said. "We need a new Sembrich."

She produced a mild laugh, which seemed to her the best answer. It might mean anything and it sounded appreciative.

"Good luck to you at the recital," he added, opening the door for her, "and let us know if there is anything else that we can do for you. Good morning."

"Good morning."

Dorothy passed down to the Press Department door. She rapped at the glass.

"Come in if you like," droned a voice from within.

Dorothy opened the door and found Tommy slouching at his desk, scanning the morning papers. He jumped up as she entered.

"Hello, Dot, old dear," he said cordially. "I didn't think that could be you. I'm glad it is, though."

"I just stopped in to thank you for the wonderful——"

"Wonderful?"

He smiled.

"It isn't so wonderful. It's just part of the job. I was lucky in having such a good subject."

"Now, Tommy——"

Tommy in this mood was something new and rather agreeable. He seemed quite nice today.

“Our Little Girl”

“No, that’s a fact, Dot. The editors like to get a pretty picture now and then.”

“But how did you do it?”

“It was so simple that you wouldn’t believe me if I told you. We just sent the pictures in and they printed them. They seem to like you. Here’s your scrap-book to date.”

He showed her a gray book, several pages of which were filled with pictures of Dorothy and with printed matter. She ran through it eagerly.

“It’s wonderful. May I have it?”

“That’s the office book. But I’ll have a duplicate made up for you.”

She watched him type a “Snappygram” from T. A. B. to J. G.

“Duplicate scrap-book for Miss Reitz, please.”

“Miss Gray will fix one for you. Did you see your interview in the *Cosmos*?”

He handed her a copy of that musical gazette. On the fifth page she found a large picture of herself, headed “A Lovely Débutante.” Followed an article by Elizabeth Weatherby.

“One has only to look at Dorothy Reitz, the charming young soprano who is to make her début at Aeolian next Saturday afternoon,” she read, “to realize that here is a singer who can captivate an audience before she sings a note. Not that she is not an unusually gifted vocalist. Those who have heard her describe her as a singer of rare ability and her musical intelligence shines from her deep, spiritual eyes whenever a musical topic is mentioned in her hearing. I was fascinated when she told me her ideas of interpretation and technique. Here, I thought, was a young woman whose beauty might have brought her a place in society but who forsook the at-

tractions of the *haut monde* so that she might bring her great art to the multitude.

"Miss Reitz was born in New York City not so many years ago. Even as a child she was musical——"

And then came a comprehensive and somewhat accurate account of Dorothy's musical career.

"It's wonderful!"

"I'm glad you like it."

Dorothy thought that she saw something sardonic about the corners of Tommy's mouth. But she wasn't sure. At any rate, her scrap-book was a treasure to be envied.

"Do all of your artists get such publicity?" she asked.

"Well—not all. Some very fine artists simply don't appeal to editors. Some do one thing or another that bars them from much mention in the musical papers. You seem to be what we call a 'natural'. Of course, I was delighted to see you getting so much——"

Tommy stopped suddenly and looked about. He straightened up in his chair, and his face became almost expressionless. He looked at Dorothy very hard. When he spoke, his voice was low.

"You're going to give your recital next Saturday," he said. "You may be a great musician. I hope so. You may have just ordinary success. How well you go over depends on a great many things, some of which are out of your control or mine or anyone else's. If things go well, you'll be an established concert artist on Sunday morning. And that's why I'm going to tell you something now, so that at least you'll know that I told it to you before you acquired any widespread reputation."

This mood was less attractive. He seemed to be lapsing back into the old Tommy, the young man who had tried to make love to her.

"Do you know that you and I have spoken hardly an

“Our Little Girl”

honest word since we’ve known each other? You’ve been playing a part—I don’t mean this in any unfriendly way—and I’ve been acting, too. It’s quite apparent to me that you at least suspect how I feel about you—and I know very well how you feel about me. I’m just something amusing, even useful——”

Dorothy protested. She couldn’t admit that.

“Maybe I don’t express it well. I’m not accusing you of gold-digging or anything like that. Heaven knows, you’d be a mighty poor gold-digger if you dug in my back yard! It’s a hard thing to express, Dot, and I don’t know whether I can. It’s not like writing press stories. What I mean is—well, I might as well say it as crudely as possible and have it over with—I suppose I love you.”

Dorothy made a motion that indicated that she wanted to interrupt.

“That isn’t clear, either, I guess,” Tommy continued. “I never had any particular hope of marrying you—not because I didn’t want to or because I didn’t like you more than any girl I’ve ever known—but because I always felt that that would be one of those things that never happen. I knew that you didn’t feel toward me the way you felt toward——

“Well, I might as well come out with that, too. If you don’t think that I know that some one else has the inside track—well, I know it, that’s all. And I oughtn’t to complain if you like some one else better than you like me. Knowing that my case is hopeless and knowing that you probably would be happier with some one else, I really ought to stop thinking about you. I tried to play being unaware and ultra-snappy when you were in here, but it was a boomerang. You were in my mind more than ever then. I’ve suppressed my feelings so long that I’m full of them. It all reasons out charmingly. You

don't care about me particularly, so why should I brood over it? But it doesn't seem to be anything one can reason out, after all. That's the damn thing about being human.

"You've given me a million hints in one way or another that I didn't interest you the way I wanted to. I didn't act on them, although Heaven knows I caught them."

He stopped suddenly.

"You're going to have a hard time saying anything to that," he continued. "It's not very nice of me to inflict a speech like that on you, when you come here on business. I oughtn't to do it anyhow. And if it weren't that you might think some day that I liked you because you were a celebrity or something like that, I don't suppose I'd ever have said anything. I'd have stood by and been silent and perhaps gone to your wedding—if you'd invited me—and then—I don't know. Such things wear themselves out. I don't know what you'll make of all this. It's a strange declaration of love, and I'm not certain that it's a declaration of love at all. Emotionally, I love you, but intellectually I know I shouldn't, and I don't know whether I love you or not. It's a hell of a feeling, whatever it is."

He lit a cigarette.

"Now that that's over," he continued, "try to think of me merely as a friend—some one who likes to be with you and with whom you like to be—as a friend and nothing more. We'll get along much more comfortably on that basis. I won't be blurting out hints half-heartedly and you won't be obliged to tell me that Arnold Deering is the only man——"

He had no right to assume any such thing, much less to say it.

"But, Tommy! Don't say such things!"

"That's just the sort of speech I wish you'd drop. Let's

"Our Little Girl"

throw our cards on the table. In fact, let's quit playing cards. Let's just be friends—and try to forget all I've told you. I had to say it, but forget it."

Dorothy looked at him curiously. She wasn't certain that this outbreak wasn't one of his parts. He seemed sincere enough and yet——

She held out her hand.

"All right, Tommy."

"Good girl, Dot!"

She started for the door.

"Sing a good recital," he called after her. "The press department'll look foolish if you don't!"

She smiled and left him.

She hardly knew what to think of Tommy's confession. She admitted the truth of his utterances, and yet the little touch of humor in his voice as he set himself down as a blunderer didn't altogether ring true. He was a clever young man. He had guided her to the very steps of Aeolian Hall. And yet—— There was always an "and yet" where Tommy was concerned. Even if he meant all that he said, he didn't attract her "that way." Well, he would get over it. It was too bad that he felt so keenly on the subject. Still, it was at least a bit gratifying. It wouldn't be a bad idea to tell Arnold. But it wouldn't be quite fair. She was an artist, anyhow. Artists didn't talk about calf-love. That was what was wrong with Tommy. He was young. Young. And a little vulgar.

Arnold was driving her down Fifth Avenue that evening, when the car was stopped by a traffic signal. It pulled up behind a bus. Dorothy looked idly up at the bus. On the back seat she recognized a familiar figure. It was Tommy. The pose was not so familiar. Tommy had his arm about a girl. She looked as sharply as she

could through the darkness. Had she seen that girl before?

“Oo—if any scandalmonger should see us!”

A lilting voice from the bus. Dorothy looked back as the car started, to verify her suspicions. Her surmise was correct. The young woman in Tommy’s clutch was Rose Manning.

XIV

AEOLIAN HALL, SATURDAY AFTERNOON

It seemed to Dorothy as she entered Aeolian Hall on Saturday afternoon as though she had just been born. She had spoken with singers about their débuts. Usually these occasions had been described as climaxes, as the end of a long road, as the summit of a steep hill, as the sun breaking through the clouds and other dramatic phenomena. But Dorothy was unconscious of any past. Her lessons, her conservatory days, the concerts which she had heard, the advice which she had received—all were lost to memory. Arnold and her mother were with her, but they might as well have been a ticket taker and an usher. As she walked down the corridor from Forty-second Street to a little room back stage, she heard somebody say, "That's the singer." It meant little to her. She clutched her little loose-leaf book containing the texts of her songs, and stared straight ahead.

As she went up the short flight of steps through the door to the antechamber, her mother whispered: "Is everything all right?" Dorothy nodded and looked in the mirror. She was pale. A small, stout, matronly woman in a black dress appeared.

"If there's anything you want, miss——"

She bowed by way of informing Dorothy that she was at her service.

The stage manager, a friendly young man in a brown suit, knocked at the door, and entered.

"How will you have the lights?" he inquired.

"Lights?"

Aeolian Hall, Saturday Afternoon

Dorothy had heard nothing about lights. The stage manager smiled.

"You can have them as you wish," he remarked. "Most singers like the foots on half-way. I can give them to you brilliant, if you like, or leave them out altogether. Any way you want."

Dorothy looked about in a puzzled way. She saw Goldstein looking rather distinguished in a cutaway with a white carnation in his buttonhole, mounting the steps.

"Tell him about the lights, Mr. Goldstein," she said.

Goldstein went into conference with the stage manager. She saw that the two men were standing outside, smoking cigarettes and smiling. Her mother hovered near her.

"Shall I stay with you, dear?" she asked.

Dorothy looked in the mirror, and almost unconsciously touched up her coiffure.

"Now, don't spoil it, my dear," admonished her mother.

Dorothy was irritated.

"Perhaps you'd rather I left you," said Mrs. Loamford, half sulkily.

The attendant stepped up to her.

"It's this way," she informed Mrs. Loamford. "There's very few of them that likes to have anybody around back with them at their first concerts, I've found. Of course, use your own judgment, ma'am."

Mrs. Loamford went out to Goldstein.

"Do you think I'd better not stay?" she inquired.

She marveled at his calmness. Poor Dorothy was so excited!

"Perhaps it would be better to leave her alone, for the first two groups, anyhow," advised the accompanist.

Mrs. Loamford looked to the stage manager, who nodded his approval.

"Well, perhaps I'd better go to my box, then," she

"Our Little Girl"

sighed. "A mother shouldn't stand in a child's way, should she?"

She smiled inanely at them and almost ran back to Dorothy.

"They think it's better I leave you," she said.

She kissed her heavily.

"I'll see you later, dear," she promised. "Now, do try to remember what Madame Graaberg told you, and don't be afraid of anything. Don't be nervous, dear. Just sing the way you know, and we'll all be so proud of you! Good-bye, my baby, and God bless you!"

Dorothy looked up. The attendant came in.

"What can I do, miss?"

"See if I have some rouge in my bag—please—and a little water."

"Some singers don't drink water just before they go in, miss. It tightens the throat. Better suck a lemon."

Dorothy shuddered.

"I won't—I won't have anything."

The attendant handed her the rouge. She tried to color her lips, but her hands trembled. She couldn't control the lipstick.

"Maybe I can help you?"

The attendant took the rouge from her hands, and helped her make up.

"You look fetching, miss, fetching. Now don't touch it a bit more. It's just right for the lights."

"Isn't it time to start?"

"Lord, no, not for ten minutes. You've got a beautiful house, miss."

She led Dorothy to a little aperture in the wall.

"Look, ain't that a lovely house? Why, the poor girl who played here last night didn't have a handful. Oh, it was pitiful, miss, there was just a few of them here and

Aeolian Hall, Saturday Afternoon

they was scattered all over the orchestra. Not a soul in the balcony and half the boxes empty. But did she mind it? Not a bit! She just went ahead and played the program like she was playing for a few friends in her own home. Never saw anything so cool in my life. And she was just a little girl—couldn't have been more than twenty."

Goldstein came in.

"It's a good house," he commented, as he took the music from his bag and sorted it. "If it keeps on coming in like this, they'll have to stand them up."

"Can't we start now?" asked Dorothy.

"Got to wait till three."

She shrugged her shoulders impatiently. . . .

"We can go on now, if you're ready."

She looked up at Goldstein.

"Oh, is it time?"

He helped her from her chair and walked to the door to the stage.

She hesitated.

"You go first," he whispered, with an ironic smile.

She found herself walking to the stage. She heard handclapping. She smiled and looked out into the auditorium. She could see faces everywhere and spots of color, but she could distinguish no individuals. She advanced to the footlights in front of the large black piano, and bowed. The applause died down. She looked back at Goldstein, who was striking a few chords. Suddenly he played the introductory measures to her first aria. Involuntarily she started to sing. She pressed the book of words between her hands as she sang, and half-closed her eyes, as though to shut out the audience and the hall. She heard herself singing, as though it were a voice from a phonograph. It was no effort to sing. It came almost

"Our Little Girl"

of itself. Then she realized that she had finished the aria, and opened her eyes. She heard handclapping and saw a few persons in the front row smite their palms together. She smiled and bowed. She looked at Goldstein, who nodded at her and played the opening measures of "Se tu m'ami."

Again she half-closed her eyes, and looked up as she sang. Something prompted her to lower her head. She realized that she was singing more easily. Near the end she remembered something that Soedlich had said. She tossed her head back mischievously at the conclusion of the song and discovered that the applause sounded heartier than before. The handclapping persisted for a few seconds. Then Goldstein struck more chords, and she started her final aria. She realized that her breath deserted her in some of the sustained passages. She gathered herself together and flung the final high note out into the auditorium with all the strength that she could summon. It sounded strident, but full. She smiled, and started to leave the stage.

She sank into her chair back-stage.

"How was it?" she gasped.

"Fine," commented Goldstein. "Listen to them. Go out and take a bow."

She went back to the stage, and smiled. There seemed to be a great blur of hands, and much rustling up and down the aisles. She went back.

"Take another bow," said Goldstein.

Again she went out, and smiled.

When she came back, the applause had stopped.

"Rest a few minutes," suggested Goldstein, who went outside to smoke another cigarette with the stage manager.

The attendant bowed herself in.

Aeolian Hall, Saturday Afternoon

"Fine, miss, fine," she said. "Now, just relax a bit—that's it. People are saying you're wonderful."

Dorothy closed her eyes and nodded absently. She was curiously aware that she was not wholly conscious of what was going on. She was a machine, and Goldstein seemed to be the mechanic who started her and stopped her. . . .

"French group."

Goldstein again led her to the stage, where she bowed in response to a patter of applause.

It was a little easier now. She almost enjoyed singing the third number of the group, a quick little ditty by Four-drain. The applause seemed rather continuous. She looked at Goldstein. He turned the music back to the first page, and repeated the introduction. She sang the song again, with a feeling of triumph. The audience had encored her. The last number seemed a bit of strain. Was she getting tired? Her breath seemed uncertain, and the upper tones taxed her. Yet there was applause. She took a bow.

"Encore."

Goldstein followed her to the stage, carrying a piece of music, a Weckerlin Bergerette. It was not difficult to sing, and Madame Graaberg had always said that it was virtually written for Dorothy's voice. She enjoyed singing it. There was no effort and her middle register mezza-voce sounded excellent, she thought. There was applause after the selection, and Goldstein sent her out for another bow. Ushers came running down the aisles with flowers, of which Goldstein relieved them.

"Another song?" she asked.

"Better wait. Take it easy."

Mrs. Loamford rushed into the little room, and threw her arms around Dorothy.

"Our Little Girl"

"It's wonderful!" she cried. "Glorious! It's the proudest day of my life! Everyone is crazy about you!"

Dorothy kissed her automatically.

Mrs. Loamford inspected the flowers, which Dorothy had absent-mindedly carried back-stage.

"Oh, how wonderful!"

"Lovely," cried Dorothy.

She examined the cards.

"Best love and all good wishes for a substantial success—Uncle Elliott."

"Success!—Arnold."

"Fondest love always and best wishes—Mother."

"Miss Dorothy Reitz, Aeolian Hall, from the Underwood Concert Corporation."

"Thank you so much!" said Dorothy, a little unsteadily as she kissed her mother.

She fingered Arnold's bouquet.

"Aren't they gorgeous?"

Goldstein beckoned to her.

"Leave them on the piano when you go out again," he suggested. "It's a good stunt."

The attendant tactfully captured Mrs. Loamford's attention.

"Don't excite her, please," she recommended. "She needs a little rest. She's singing so fine, too, ma'am!"

Mrs. Loamford again looked to Goldstein for a decision.

"Better wait till she's all through."

She delivered another reverberating smack on Dorothy's cheek and left.

Dorothy became a little concerned over the reception of the two Brahms songs which opened the German group. There was applause, but it was little compared to that which had followed her French numbers. Was it be-

Aeolian Hall, Saturday Afternoon

cause the songs were in German? Perhaps it was that Brahms appealed only to the more sober music lovers. The mild approval of Brahms spurred her on to deliver Schumann's "Lady Bug" trifle with unwonted archness. She was not altogether surprised when she found Goldstein signaling a repetition. The closing number of the group, Richard Strauss' "Morgen," seemed to meet with only fair applause. She took a bow.

"Encore," snapped Goldstein. "Now."

Her reappearance met with applause. Her selection, Schubert's "Heidenröslein," was well received.

"Enough," murmured Goldstein.

"Is it really going well?" she asked Goldstein.

"Fine."

She noticed that a few auditors had left when she came out for her final group in English. It seemed to her that she was singing well now. Each number met with applause, and La Forge's "To a Messenger" had to be repeated. Her final selection, Benjamin Whelpley's "The Nightingale Hath a Lyre of Gold," sounded a little strained to her, and she knew that not all of the high notes were as velvety as those of the soprano whom she had first heard sing the song. But there was applause, and she saw that some of the audience were gathering about the footlights.

Goldstein took her out for an encore, which brought smiles and applause from the colony near the stage. She sang another song.

"Better do one more and call it a day."

Goldstein had suggested "Will o' the Wisp" for a final number.

"Always gets them," he had observed.

Dorothy sang the effective little song with as little restraint as if she had been singing for Madame Graaberg

"Our Little Girl"

in the studio. The little colony applauded enthusiastically.

"That's all."

Goldstein called to the stage manager.

"Kill the lights."

"Don't you think——"

Goldstein cut short Dorothy's question.

"Good stunt to kill the lights. Always works. Well—congratulations."

She shook his hand.

"Thank you so much. I don't know what I would have done without you!"

"Thanks. Better go down to reception."

Mrs. Loamford stormed in, smiling and weeping.

"My little baby!" she exclaimed, embracing Dorothy so violently that her frock became disheveled. "My adorable baby! My little prima donna!"

Arnold was just outside.

"Wonderful, Dot, great!" he cried, taking her hands

He turned to Mrs. Loamford.

"I suppose I may give her a kiss of congrat——"

"Of course, Arnold, you dear boy!"

He kissed Dorothy, and she returned his kiss with a little peck which landed on his chin.

"A little excited, dear, aren't you?" he laughed. "There are so many people waiting for you downstairs in the reception-room. Let's go."

With the aid of the attendant, Dorothy made herself presentable.

"Don't you want your flowers, miss?"

The attendant handed them to her, and also heaped Arnold with blossoms.

Mrs. Loamford slipped a bill to the attendant.

"Thank you so much, ma'am. A big success. Wonderful. I enjoyed it myself."

Aeolian Hall, Saturday Afternoon

Downstairs there were little knots of observers waiting for Dorothy. Several women shook her hand almost viciously and congratulated her profusely. The mist which seemed to hang over Dorothy throughout the recital was dispelled. She felt now as though she had awakened to find herself famous.

"Did you like it? I'm so glad!"

It sounded well, and she knew that she was smiling most attractively.

"Oh, my dear Madame Graaberg! I'm so glad I pleased you!"

She kissed her old teacher effusively.

"Isn't she sweet?"

She smiled as she heard the comment.

"Miss Reitz, my name is Werner. I'm a trombone player but I enjoy vocal music, and I want to tell you how much pleasure I got out of your concert."

"Thank you so much, Mr.—Werner, wasn't it? I'm so glad you enjoyed it!"

It was easy.

"Fine, Miss Reitz!"

She saw Maxwell in front of her with Tommy.

"Come in and see me early in the week," he added.

Tommy stopped briefly.

"You sang awfully well, Dot," he remarked, shaking her hand.

Then Tommy and Maxwell marched off arm in arm. Maxwell laughed loudly at some comment of Tommy's. She wondered for an instant what it could have been.

"A damn fine recital, little lady!"

Harper shook her hands athletically.

"One of the best first recitals I've ever heard, and I've heard a hell of a lot of them!"

"Does he always talk like that?" asked Arnold.

"Our Little Girl"

"He's very nice—he's one of my managers. . . . Thank you so much! I'm so glad you liked it."

"Dottie, dear, you were a knock-out!"

Rose Manning had kissed her before she knew it.

"Thank you so much! I'm so glad you liked it!"

The crowd seemed to be thinning out. Some of the lights in the room were extinguished. Arnold and Mrs. Loamford led Dorothy upstairs and to the street, where Arnold's car was waiting. A few persons followed the party.

"That's her husband."

Arnold laughed delightedly at this comment from one of the bystanders, and Mrs. Loamford beamed happily. Dorothy smiled politely.

A few young women started clapping their hands as Dorothy stepped into the car. She took off her corsage and threw it to them.

"Isn't she the sweetest thing!"

Arnold started down Forty-second Street. Dorothy leaned back in the car.

"Is my baby tired?"

Mrs. Loamford kissed her.

"My wonderful girl!"

She drew the lap robe over Dorothy.

"My little girl's a real prima donna now!"

XV

137 WEST 88TH STREET, SUNDAY MORNING

The prima-donna feeling was the most delicious that Dorothy had ever experienced. It seemed to her that even the traffic policemen on the way home smiled at her in recognition. There was a festal air about the household. Uncle Elliott, dressed almost as ornately as he would have been for a valued business associate's funeral, welcomed her with two splashy kisses and hundreds of apologies.

"I meant to go, dear," he explained, "and then, at noon, there was a credits conference. Business is in a bad way, you know, and the chairman of the committee called the meeting suddenly. I kicked like a steer, but my colleagues insisted on holding it this afternoon, so that we could have plenty of time to thrash the matter out. A representative of the most progressive firm in the line. I couldn't leave until after five o'clock—I'll never forgive myself for having missed it. It must have been a smashing success."

"You've heard about it so soon?" asked Dorothy.

"You bet I have! When I saw that I couldn't get away, I rang up my secretary and told her to use the tickets. She raved about you!"

"Now, Elliott, give our little prima donna a chance to rest up and get dressed for dinner."

Uncle Elliott deferred to his sister.

"All right—but just a minute. I have a little surprise."

He pulled a package wrapped in tissue paper from his pocket.

"Our Little Girl"

"For our prima donna," he said, as though he were introducing an after-dinner speaker.

Dorothy tore off the wrapping and opened the long white box within.

"Oh, marvelous!" she screamed ecstatically. "Gorgeous! Look, Arnold!"

She lifted out a string of pearls.

"The most beautiful thing I ever saw!"

She embraced Uncle Elliott frantically and kissed him.

"I must wear them at once!"

She placed them about her neck and looked in the nearest mirror.

"Marvelous! Gorgeous! Wonderful!"

She turned to Arnold.

"Arnold! Take me out somewhere tonight! I *must* wear these pearls!"

Arnold gave her a respectable but hearty embrace.

"Tickled to death. Anywhere you say."

"You pick the place. I can't think now."

She waved her hands as though to brush everyone aside and went to her room.

"A regular prima donna, isn't she?" commented Mrs. Loamford, almost bursting with pleasure.

"Yes—and a regular girl, too!" added Arnold, involuntarily adjusting his necktie.

"You dear boy!"

Mrs. Loamford squeezed his arm affectionately.

"And so muscular!"

"I play a good deal of golf," explained Arnold with no little pride.

Uncle Elliott bobbed his head up and down in an understanding way.

"Anything you want to say to me, Deering?" he asked deliberately.

He took out a cigar. Then he produced another, and handed it to Arnold.

"Well—not yet—but——"

Arnold grinned a little foolishly and started to light his cigar. He suddenly came to, and held out the light for Uncle Elliott's benefit.

"Don't ask Arnold such embarrassing questions," scolded Mrs. Loamford, with an almost lewd smile.

"I understand," Uncle Elliott snapped out, bouncing the words off his cigar.

It was a radiant night for Dorothy. Arnold returned after dinner, groomed as she had never seen him—and he had always looked immaculately trim—to take her to a theatre. Her mother and her uncle waved them farewell from the door, as though she were an opera star leaving the Metropolitan after a sensational performance or a bride leaving the church after a brilliant wedding. She hardly noticed the play which they went to see. She hardly was aware of the supper and the dancing which followed. She hardly noticed Arnold except that she felt his presence to be inevitable, logical and altogether delightful.

Over creamy café-parfaits, Arnold took her hands in his.

"Dot," he said, steadily, "let's—let's announce our engagement."

She disengaged her hands, but she looked softly at him. He was wonderfully attractive tonight.

"Why, Arnold—I don't know what to say now. I'll be going on a concert tour soon, I hope. I don't know what to say."

Queer, how the tour suddenly occurred to her!

Arnold regained possession of her hands.

"Tell you what. You go on your tour. And when you come back, we'll announce it."

"Our Little Girl"

Dorothy leaned over very close to him.

She said nothing.

She nodded.

"Oh, you adorable girl!" he murmured. "We'll go out Monday and get the ring. It'll be the most beautiful ring you ever saw."

"I'd rather—I'd rather wait until after my tour."

"Well, all right, sweetheart. We'll let it go at an understanding—but such an understanding!—yes?"

Again she said nothing. It wasn't necessary.

"Let's go home," suggested Arnold.

They spoke little on the way uptown, and Arnold disregarded the code against one-arm driving.

"I'll have to tell mother and Uncle Elliott, of course," she said, as they sat close together on the couch in the parlor, "but it'll be our secret until I return from my tour."

He kissed her and she returned the kiss.

"God!" he murmured again and again. "I'm the happiest man in the world!"

The subdued chime of the parlor clock notified them that it was within a few hours of dawn.

"Now, darling, you'll need your sleep," he almost whispered. "You've had such a day of it!"

Arm in arm they went to the door.

"I'll come very early in the morning," he said, "and—and I'll bring your reviews."

Reviews!

She had almost forgotten that she had made her *début* within the past twenty-four hours.

"That'll be so sweet of you," she said, a little wearily. "You're so good. Good night, darling."

"Good night, most wonderful girl in the world!"

There was a long kiss.

She watched him as he stepped into the car, and he looked back all the way to the corner. For a few moments she stood, looking into the cool, brilliant October night. She threw a kiss to the stars.

"Oh-o-o-o-oh!"

A long sigh of happiness and weariness.

And she dreamed that Arnold was showing her papers. All of them seemed hazy except one, which bore a heavy black headline, "NEW PRIMA DONNA WONDERFUL—A PEARL AMONG SINGERS." And the Aeolian Hall attendant came up from nowhere and said: "You'll have to stop reading that now, miss. You'll get tired." Dorothy handed her a pearl necklace. Goldstein was eating a café-parfait with a cigarette in the corner of his mouth. . . .

She awoke very early. It must have been nine o'clock. She stretched and decided that it was too early to get up of a Sunday. Then she remembered that Arnold was coming.

She was a little startled to find her mother already in the dining-room. Mrs. Loamford usually had breakfast in bed.

"I couldn't sleep, Dorothy," she explained. "Uncle Elliott ought to be here any minute. I just can't wait to see what the papers said."

Dorothy kissed her.

"I have a little secret——"

Her mother understood without letting Dorothy finish her confession. She embraced her, and laughed and cried and kissed for minutes.

"I knew it all along, my little baby. He's such a wonderful boy!"

"But it's only an understanding now, mother. We're not going to announce it to anybody until I come back from my tour."

"Our Little Girl"

"Tour?"

Her mother looked perplexed.

"Of course. I must go on tour now for a few months and give concerts in a lot of cities."

Her mother nodded.

"Yes, yes. Oh, I'm so happy! We must tell Uncle Elliott."

Dorothy wagged a finger coyly.

"But nobody else!"

"Nobody else. My little baby engaged! Oh!"

She wept rapturously.

Dorothy looked out of the window.

"Here's Uncle Elliott!"

Uncle Elliott arrived with a great bundle of newspapers. He looked rather grim, Dorothy thought.

As he entered the parlor, Mrs. Loamford embraced him.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she cried.

"Isn't what wonderful?"

His tone was decidedly matter-of-fact.

"Dorothy's—Dorothy's going to be engaged to Arnold!"

Uncle Elliott kissed Dorothy.

"That's no surprise to me, little one," he observed.

"You're getting a fine, snappy, wide-awake young fellow. Congratulations!"

"Why, you're not excited, Elliott!" complained his sister.

"Excited—why—I could see it coming all along—but I think it's splendid. When are you going to be married?"

"Why—I suppose sometime next spring," said Dorothy.

"A June wedding!" called out Mrs. Loamford. "A June wedding! It'll be wonderful!"

"Don't say anything about it yet, Elliott," she added suddenly. "They're not going to announce it till Dorothy returns from her tour."

"What tour?"

"Oh, don't you know? Dorothy's going to sing in all the big cities. Isn't it wonderful?"

Uncle Elliott sat down and undid his parcel of papers energetically.

"Now, here are the reviews," he said. "Of course, there'll be more tomorrow when the evening papers come out——"

Mrs. Loamford paled.

"Aren't they—good?" she faltered.

"Well——"

He cleared his throat.

"These are rather short, but—but maybe they're not so bad for a first recital."

Mrs. Loamford snatched for the papers, but her brother pulled them aside.

"Better read this one first," he suggested, handing her the *Herald*.

The *Herald's* review:

MISS REITZ SINGS

Dorothy Reitz, a young soprano hitherto unheard in New York, made her début at Aeolian Hall yesterday afternoon in a conventional program which included songs and arias by Gluck, Pergolesi, Handel, Hue, Faure, Fourdrain, Poldowski, Brahms, Schumann, Strauss, and a group of songs in English. The young singer was charming to look at, and sang well with rather limited vocal resources. Her middle register was appealing, and the audience, which filled the hall, seemed to enjoy her work. DeWitt Goldstein was a sympathetic accompanist.

“Our Little Girl”

“Is that all?” demanded Mrs. Loamford.

“It’s not so bad,” commented Uncle Elliott.

Dorothy knew that an artist should not discuss her criticisms.

“Some of it’s very good, I think,” she said, therefore.

“Here are the rest,” said Uncle Elliott.

The *Tribune’s* review :

NEW SINGER IN DEBUT

A large and apparently enthusiastic audience filled Aeolian Hall yesterday afternoon to hear Dorothy Reitz, a young soprano, said to be American trained. Miss Reitz has a light voice, which she uses well except when she forces it, and sings with intelligence. With a few more years of training, she should develop into a capable lieder singer. She was most successful in a group of French songs. DeWitt Goldstein was a sympathetic accompanist.

The *Times’* review :

DOROTHY REITZ IN SONGS

A new soprano, very good to gaze on, Dorothy Reitz, gave her first recital in Aeolian Hall yesterday afternoon before an audience that filled the house. The newcomer sings well, although without much distinction either in voice or in interpretations. The audience seemed to like her offerings, which included Italian, German, French and American songs and called for encores. DeWitt Goldstein was a sympathetic accompanist.

The *American's* review:

Dorothy Reitz, a handsome young soprano, made her début in Aeolian Hall yesterday afternoon before a goodly audience in a diversified program. She seemed to please and was well received by a friendly audience. DeWitt Goldstein was a sympathetic accompanist.

The *World's* review:

DOROTHY REITZ

Many songs, none of them new, were on the program of Dorothy Reitz, who entertained at Aeolian Hall in the afternoon yesterday. In her French songs, Miss Reitz conveyed a mild charm, that undoubtedly would be more effective in a drawing-room. She displayed no reason, except an effective stage presence, why she should give a recital at this stage of her development. DeWitt Goldstein was a sympathetic accompanist.

"One thing seems to be certain," remarked Uncle Eliott. "DeWitt Goldstein was a sympathetic accompanist."

"That *World* review is malicious!" sobbed Mrs. Loamford. "Can't we sue them for something?"

"Now, don't get hysterical," he counseled; "that's the only really bad one in the lot. Most people who amount to anything read the *Times*, and the *Times* was very fair."

"I—I don't think they're so awful," said Dorothy in a subdued tone.

"Let's get down to brass tacks," suggested Uncle El-

"Our Little Girl"

liott. "Four are fair and one's bad. Maybe the evening papers will be better. You can't tell. Now, personally, I feel about the whole matter as I would in the case of a salesman who made his first trip on the road. Once in a while a man puts over a knock-out in the first round. Usually you don't get everything you want on the first trip. There's that big department store in Minneapolis. For three years their buyer wouldn't see our men. Then I went out myself. I was closeted with that buyer for five hours. I got down to rock bottom with him. We went to the mat all afternoon. When I got back to the hotel, I had a contract putting Reitz hats exclusively into that store. We were three years getting there, but by God! we got there with both feet when we got there!"

He chewed off the end of a cigar.

"Now in your case, Dorothy, you've got the goods. You didn't sell a big bill the first time out, but you made an impression. Just keep after them. Keep hammering at them. That's the only way to win out."

A brief ring of the doorbell announced Arnold. He rushed into the parlor, carrying a pile of papers and kissed Dorothy.

"Dot, dear!" he exclaimed. "They're wonderful!"

"Oh, Arnold!" sobbed Mrs. Loamford. "Did you see the *World*? That mean——"

"That's nothing," he said grandly. "That sounds as if it were written by some ten-dollar-a-week cub reporter. The notices are very nice."

"Thank you so much, Arnold," said Dorothy, as she kissed him.

"By the way, Deering," said Uncle Elliott, "I want to congratulate you. Have a cigar."

Arnold shook his hand a little bashfully.

"Aren't you going to kiss your new mother?"

Arnold bestowed a faint kiss on Mrs. Loamford.

"This is the happiest moment of my life!" she sobbed.

"Now," announced Arnold, "I think Dorothy and I will go out for a little ride. Everybody will want to see her after these nice reviews, and she needs a little rest."

They were running easily up Riverside Drive when Dorothy reverted to the reviews.

"Do you really think they're good?" she asked.

"They're wonderful!" he asserted. "Especially for a first recital. I'll say that many an old-timer would be glad to get them."

"Do you think the evening papers will be any better?"

"Certainly, dearie. Look how those morning paper reporters have to rush to get their things in. The evening paper men have more time to think it over. They'll appreciate you. What do you care, anyhow, while you have——"

He was about to say "while you have me."

"While we have each other."

She kissed him.

"You're a sweet man."

"You're a sweet singer."

She laughed delightedly over his apt retort, and he joined in her merriment. The Monday evening papers, over which Arnold and Dorothy speculated all day, all evening and almost all night, brought in these findings in the case of Dorothy Reitz, soprano:

The Journal:

Other concerts of the week-end were the recital of Dorothy Reitz, soprano, at Aeolian Hall on Saturday afternoon; Lambert Marks, violinist at Town Hall on Saturday evening . . .

"Our Little Girl"

The Evening Mail:

Cool, fluffy and lovely, Dorothy Reitz looked bewitching at Aeolian Hall on Saturday afternoon, and the large crowd enjoyed her fine-spun notes in Italian, French, German and songs in her own native tongue. You could hardly keep your eyes off this pretty slip of a soprano, and you could feel that she had real promise. DeWitt Goldstein was a sympathetic accompanist.

The Evening World:

Among others who entertained this week-end were Dorothy Reitz, whose form delights even when her singing affrights, at Aeolian Hall on Saturday afternoon; Sascha Pendelton, violinist, at Town Hall . . .

The Globe:

. . . and other recitalists included Lambert Marks, violinist, Sascha Pendelton, also a fiddler, and Dorothy Reitz, a débutante soprano.

The Telegram:

. . . at the same time Dorothy Reitz, soprano was giving her first program at Aeolian Hall, singing songs in Italian, German, French and English.

The Evening Post:

. . . other artists, who must be dismissed with mere mention include Dorothy Reitz, soprano, who offered a conventional program at Aeolian

Hall on Saturday afternoon; Sascha Pendleton . . .

The Sun:

DOROTHY REITZ

Limpid tones poured unlimpingly across the reaches and arches of Aeolian Hall on Saturday afternoon when Dorothy Reitz, as pretty as a picture and considerably more musical, made her début in a polylingual program. Her personality and her taste are electric and eclectic, respectively. There was something of the dryad in her singing of Pergolese's "Se tu m'ami" early in the afternoon and something of the druid in the sweet patience with which she responded to the clapping of many delighted hands at the end of her fall display of vocal fashions. And if her singing was not always pleasing to the critical ear, her stage presence was always a treat for the critical eye. Later perhaps she will sing better. She could hardly look better. DeWitt Goldstein was a sympathetic accompanist.

XVI

PRIMA DONNA

Two young women were accountable for many things, yet Dorothy never knew either of them and heard of them only once. The two young women were Genevieve Robertson and Fifi Morgan, sopranos.

With the reviews of her recital before her, Dorothy was trying to take stock. The criticisms were not raptures. Neither were they, taken as a whole, uncordial, Dorothy decided that they were better than the average or even better than that. Something that some one had told her came back:

"They may not accept you at your first recital. It is the history of many great singers that they aroused no enthusiasm at their début. Caruso was known as 'the broken tenor' in his early days. Even his appearance in New York was not sensational. Sembrich, one of the greatest vocal stylists of all time, did not electrify the town overnight. Most great artists do not awake to find themselves famous. It is a slow, steady——"

She glanced over her reviews again, skipping quickly past the *World's* comment, which seemed like a nightmare. Then it occurred to her that it might be interesting to measure up her criticisms with the greetings bestowed on other singers who had appeared over the memorable week-end.

Genevieve Robertson and Fifi Morgan were the other sopranos. Dorothy noted with modest glee that these artists had received little critical attention. Apparently she was the only newcomer who had been able to draw

reviewers into the house. The notices that fell to the lot of the Misses Robertson and Morgan were brief and uncomplimentary. Miss Robertson, according to the only newspaper that gave her more than passing mention, "entertained her friends." Miss Morgan's two specific reviews announced that she was "by no means ready for public appearances" and that she was "another singer who seemed able to obtain a hearing for reasons not obvious to this reviewer."

Dorothy's reviews began to expand. They seemed longer. They seemed more enthusiastic. They were amiable in tone. They were downright complimentary. She found a ruler and measured the number of inches that had been devoted to her, compared to the space that had been allotted to the Misses Robertson and Morgan. Dorothy's total was ten times that of her rival sopranos combined.

She clipped her criticisms neatly and pasted them in her scrap-book. The book already was assuming flattering proportions. More than a dozen pictures from daily newspapers and from musical magazines stared from its pages. Twenty-five clippings related to the recent recital. She mounted her reviews on a double page. There was a little space left in one corner. An interesting notion came to her. She clipped the inquests over the artistic aspirations of the Misses Robertson and Morgan and pasted them in the vacancy. Then she wrote a legend above them:

"Made *début* at the same time."

The lay-out delighted her. She drew lines under the most favorable observations in her criticisms. Bulked up, they proved that Dorothy had no little charm as a recitalist. By way of contrast, she underscored the condemnations of the Misses Robertson and Morgan. Any one who inspected this assortment of cuttings would

"Our Little Girl"

know that Dorothy Reitz was one of the most promising singers that had appeared in many moons.

The pen in her hand prompted her to further thoughts. Ought she not to write to some of the critics and thank them for their kindness? But, on the other hand, would that not be considered the mark of the novice? Better not write. An autographed picture, perhaps? No; it wasn't quite the thing to send to a reviewer.

"Whatever you do, don't try to draw attention to yourself, so far as critics are concerned. You won't gain by personal attentions. They may become suspicious."

Who had said that? That was one of the thousand shreds of advice that Tommy had bestowed on her at various times. Poor dear Tommy! He seemed so far in the past now. He had been rather helpful. She felt kindly toward him. Yes; he probably was right on the subject of writing letters to critics.

On her desk lay a little pile of pictures. She must send some one an autograph! All good singers distributed autographs.

"DeWitt Goldstein was a sympathetic accompanist."

Goldstein, of course! He had been of great assistance. Not inspiring, exactly. She would have a more famous pianist for her next appearance. Still, Goldstein had done very nicely.

"To Mr. DeWitt Goldstein,

"With best wishes,

"Dorothy R. Loamford."

She tore up the picture quickly. One thing that she must learn for all time was to write her name as Dorothy Reitz. She experimented with signatures. Her writing was square—she had always prided herself on it as an "interesting" hand—but it lacked something artistic. She tried a long "D" and a small "orothy," with the "y" end-

ing in a jerky line running under the name. This was better. A long "R" and a small "eitz," with the "z" ending in a line parallel to the prolonged "y" completed the formula. She admired the signature. It was a prima donna's signature.

"To Mr. DeWitt Goldstein,

"With best wishes,

"Dorothy Reitz."

This was better. It was more than better. It was extremely good. It was more than extremely good. It was very "characteristic."

Maxwell ought to have a picture. She had noticed autographs from many artists in his office. Some of them had tried to be clever. Well, she could be clever, too.

"To Mr. Saul Maxwell

"My 'impresario'

"With *best* wishes,

"Dorothy Reitz."

It looked clever. It *was* clever. She reflected that she might have been an author if she hadn't decided to devote herself to music. Harper ought to have one, too. "Sincerely" was enough to put on his autograph. He was a little fresh, but he had a good heart. "Very sincerely."

Accompanied by her autographs Dorothy set out for the Underwood offices. There would be a different reception now. Hitherto, she had been an unknown quantity. Now she was an artist who had given a successful recital. There might be a tour already arranged for her. She could see herself landing in Boston, say, or Philadelphia, and being greeted by prominent musicians.

"Wouldn't you care to come to luncheon, Miss Reitz?" a gentleman in a cutaway coat would say.

"I must rest. I must be at my best tonight," she would answer.

"Our Little Girl"

"Ah, but there are many of us who have been so anxious to meet you. We have heard so much about you."

"You are so kind"—a glittering smile—"but I really must rest before the concert. I owe it to my audience."

"But you wouldn't disappoint the music lovers who have gathered at luncheon just to meet you."

"You are too kind. I ought to rest—but it would be ungracious if I did not——"

The gentleman in the cutaway offered his arm. They drove to a large hotel. Placards of Dorothy Reitz occupied prominent places in the lobby. Hundreds of persons were waiting near the banquet hall.

. . . Dorothy was already making a little after-dinner speech when she reached the offices.

Maxwell was brief and cordial.

"You did very well," he remarked. "It was an excellent showing for a first performance. The critics treated you very nicely. Of course, the big critics weren't there—they sent their assistants—but it wasn't bad at all."

"Some of the reviews were fine," assented Dorothy. "I was quite pleased."

She took out her autograph.

"I want you to have this, Mr. Maxwell," she said.

He looked at it with a smile.

"This is very good of you, Miss Reitz," he commented.

"I wanted to thank you," she said.

Maxwell seemed preoccupied. He stood, and looked casually at the door.

"Have you any out-of-town engagements for me?" asked Dorothy.

"So soon?"

"Isn't it customary to go on tour?"

"It's possible. Now, Miss Reitz, I believe that we can book you for engagements. At first, they will not bring

you much money. A few hundred dollars, out of which you will have to pay the advertising and railroading expenses. You will have to build up a following. As your reputation increases, you will be able to command a higher fee. If you wish to be booked through this office, I will give you a letter to serve as contract, by which we are authorized to book you at a commission. You may depend on our best efforts."

Was this the manner in which artists were treated?

"I don't see," she said curtly, "why I should pay for advertising."

"It is the custom, except in the case of a few very famous artists. I believe that you will find this condition prevails in all bureaus. However, the amount of advertising which you do depends on you. Usually, I recommend a page or a half-page in the leading musical papers. That should be ample for this season. Mr. Borge will prepare your copy."

This was a cursory way of dismissing the matter. She would advertise in the *Cosmos*, like all artists of standing. The fund which her father had left her had hardly been touched. But it wasn't the money; it was the principle. Maxwell might as well know it.

"How about the receipts at my recital?"

"You did pretty well—very well, indeed. You drew better than almost anyone we have had in an introductory recital this year. The total was about a hundred and fifty dollars."

A hundred and fifty dollars! and the crowded house!

"Why, the house was crowded, Mr. Maxwell! There must have been more!"

"Some one seems to have sold a block of fifty tickets. Evidently you have a friend who disposed of these. The sale at the box office amounted to about fifty dollar."

"Our Little Girl"

"But the house was full!"

Maxwell smiled.

"Do you recall our earlier conversation on the subject of passes? We issued five thousand passes—good for two tickets each. The paper came in very nicely."

So she had sung to an audience of deadheads and to the people to whom Uncle Elliott had sold tickets.

"However," added Maxwell, "it was a good showing, all things considered. Some of the other singers who appeared this week-end had nothing in the house. One, I hear, sold exactly two tickets—in the balcony. Your expenses were small, too. I told you that the average recital cost from six to seven hundred dollars. How much do you think yours cost? About five hundred. I think you're to be congratulated."

"If I give another recital, I suppose, I'll come out ahead."

"You may. No one can promise that."

Maxwell seemed cool. Dorothy thought that he ought to manifest more interest. She bowed and entered Harper's office. Harper was putting on his coat.

"Well, if it isn't the little lady!" he detonated. "A good recital, girlie, a damn good little recital!"

Harper might be uncouth, but at least he was appreciative.

"I'm so glad you liked it, Mr. Harper."

"Liked it? It was a first-class show, little lady. Did pretty well at the box-office, too. Not bad at all for a start."

This was reassuring. There was something honest and straightforward in Harper's roughness.

"I've brought you this, Mr. Harper."

He looked at the autograph and placed it in a drawer of his desk.

"I'm damn glad to have it, little lady. Got to go out now, but come in again when you can stay longer. Always tickled to death to see you."

He shook her hand heartily and went out.

She moved on to Tommy's office. Tommy was sitting on a desk, smoking a cigar, and looking jovial. A pretty young woman was sitting in his chair. Tommy always seemed to have pretty young women about.

"Listen, Marie," she heard Tommy say, "you mustn't tell ribaldries when there are artists in the office."

He waved to Dorothy.

"Come in, Dot," he said. "This is business, not pleasure."

"Meet Miss Ayres," he added, indicating the pretty young woman. "This is Miss Reitz, who bowed in so beautifully at Aeolian Hall on Saturday. Didn't you get a pass?"

"I'm so glad to know you, Miss Reitz," beamed Miss Ayres. "I enjoyed your singing so much. I didn't want to go but Mr. Borge said you were the cat's piazza."

"Is that what I said?" demanded Tommy.

"Just about. Or do you want me to tell Miss Reitz exactly what you said?"

"Listen, kitten—just that—listen. If you're going to play the phonograph, look at your records first."

This was treating Dorothy like a schoolgirl. What filthy remark had Tommy made? And what right had he to discuss her with a young woman who used language like "the cat's piazza"?

"Maybe I'd better go," suggested Miss Ayres. "You'll want to talk to Miss Reitz."

"Anything I can do for you, Dot?" asked Tommy.

Dorothy looked at him severely.

"Nothing at all."

She marched out. Tommy didn't know whom he was

"Our Little Girl"

talking to! He tried to be like Harper. But Harper was nice, and Tommy wasn't. One moment he was making love and the next he was trying to make her ridiculous in front of some young hussy.

She was angry when she reached the street. She felt that she wasn't recognized properly. Maxwell had been smooth and polite; but that was all. Harper had been bluff and friendly; but that was his way. Tommy had been downright rude; not that he mattered.

Walking across to Fifth Avenue she became more irritated. There were throngs of shoppers. She wondered whether some one in this crowd hadn't been at her recital. She half expected some one to stop, look and say "That's Dorothy Reitz." There seemed to be no disposition on the part of anyone to identify the celebrity who walked in public, trailing vain clouds of glory. She considered the propriety of phoning Arnold and demanding that he take her out for a ride. He might be busy, though. No; she wouldn't do that. Arnold was coming tonight, anyhow. He recognized her! But the dear boy really didn't know much about music. For that matter, what did Maxwell know about music? Or Harper? Or anybody?

"Why, hello, my dear!"

Dorothy looked up almost gratefully at the passer-by who had jostled her into the street. Elsie Freron stood beside her. Mme. Freron wore an expensive-looking seal-skin coat and a self-explanatory orange hat. Dorothy shuddered at the combination.

"You gave a lovely recital, my dear." Freron said affectionately. "Really, I was quite thrilled, and believe me, it takes something to give me a thrill."

"Thank you so much!"

Dorothy smiled brightly on the lady from the Metropolitan.

"I hope you didn't mind what the critics said," Freron continued. "Between you and I, what those fellows don't know about singing would fill a book. Always trying to be smart. It's always that way. When I sang 'Amneris' at a Saturday night show last year, they razed me like I was a beginner. If they hadn't known who it was—if they'd thought it was Matzenauer or one of those—they would have said how good I sang. They didn't treat you so terrible, at that. Got a lot of dates?"

"Not yet, but I expect to have a tour very soon."

"Tour, eh? Well, when you go out on tour, don't let 'em book you into Pittsburgh. I got into a joint recital there last year with some dinky little fiddler. Talk about icebergs! I sang and sang and never got a rise out of that crowd. Every time that little Jew fiddler got up and scraped away, they'd raise merry hell. It's the most unmusical town in the world. Don't let 'em stick you with it. Are you busy next Thursday night?"

Dorothy was bewildered by the speed with which Freron mingled autobiography with congratulations.

"I don't think so."

"Not running around much? That's a good idea. Stick to your own little bed, is what I say. Well, I'm having a few folks up at the apartment Thursday, and if you feel like dropping in, we'll be tickled to have you. Nothing fancy, you know. Just a few of us girls and a few regular fellows."

Dorothy didn't know whether she would enjoy a séance with "a few of us girls and a few regular fellows." She could invent some excuse——

"Just come on up. Bring a man with you, if you like. Always glad to see your friends. We'll just have a good time and maybe dancing. You'll meet a few boys from the Met, too. Do you good to meet some of 'em."

"Our Little Girl"

This mightn't be so bad. Opera was something which Dorothy hadn't considered seriously, but it might be worth while to meet some of the stars.

"Just come on up. Here's my card. Ask for my apartment. I'll look for you."

"Well, thank you. I'll be very glad to."

"Great."

Freron kissed her professionally.

"Bring a man, if you like. Bring two, if you can manage 'em. See you Thursday, dear."

But Freron's hospitality could not eradicate Dorothy's bitterness. She took a taxi home and resented the half-concealed smiles which the driver bestowed on her. Did she appeal to taxi drivers? Life should have started with her recital. It hadn't. They fussed over her at home, to be sure, but what did it mean? Nothing at all. She was tired of admiration from her own people. They would have admired her had she been one of the worst singers that ever lived.

Her mother greeted her happily.

"The most wonderful thing has happened!" she announced. "You're invited to a tea by Miss Blagden. She'd like you to meet the girls at your old school——"

Dorothy slowly drew off her coat and hat and threw them on the table. She sank back in an easy chair, and shook her head sullenly.

"That's an honor, Dorothy," expostulated Mrs. Loamford. "They've had some big people there this year."

"Big people!"

Dorothy was scornful.

"I don't intend to exhibit myself for the benefit of a lot of schoolgirls."

Her mother crossed the room and patted Dorothy gently.

"Not everybody is invited to be guest of honor at Miss Blagden's teas," she said. "Only people who have done things are asked."

"Well, let them ask somebody else. Why should I say 'Pleased to meet you' to a lot of silly little girls?"

"It doesn't take long. And remember—you're a graduate of the school. They're very proud of you."

"They're proud of me now—yes."

Dorothy sniffed.

"They'd be proud of anybody who got her name in the papers often enough."

She straightened up.

"I don't care if they're proud or what they are! I simply haven't time to waste at schoolgirl teas. I couldn't bear it!"

She shuddered.

Her mother took her hands.

"Dorothy," she said in an anxious voice, "you simply must go. I've accepted for you."

Dorothy pushed her mother's hands aside. This was the last word! Her mother still treated her as though she were a baby!

"What right did you have to do that!" cried Dorothy.

Mrs. Loamford, surprised by the outburst, started to explain.

"I thought you'd be glad to go—I didn't think——"

"Didn't think!"

Dorothy gripped the table and fairly screamed at her mother.

"Didn't think! That's just it—you didn't think!"

Something told her that this was highly effective.

"But it doesn't matter whether you thought or not. I'm not going and you can make your peace with them any way you like."

"Our Little Girl"

"All right—don't!"

Mrs. Loamford's voice was hard.

"Don't try to bully me into it," Dorothy shouted. "You can't bully me. I'm tired of being told what to do and what not to do. I'm not a baby any longer, and don't you forget it. I'm sick of being treated like an infant."

"I am still your mother!"

"I am still your mother!"

Dorothy's mimicry was not as faithful as it was savage.

"Will you ever get the idea into your head that I'm no longer six years old? I have a right to live my own life—and I'm going to do it. You may mean well, but it's really no help to me to have you taking care of me in quite that way!"

Mrs. Loamford started to retort angrily, and then, suddenly, her voice died out. She looked gray. She sank into a chair and started to weep in a curious whining way. She breathed heavily and the sharp panting and the subdued crying combined to make a low, whistling sound.

"My daughter," she sobbed. "My daughter. After all——"

The whistling sound became more acute.

Dorothy was tempted to throw her arms about her mother and to assure her that she hadn't meant what she had said. She would go to the tea. Only, for heaven's sake, stop crying. She took a step—and withdrew. If she yielded now, it would mean a victory for her mother. It would mean supervision and direction. It would mean that she was still to be treated like a child.

"Don't be hysterical," she said coldly. "You know you're only acting that way to get what you want."

Mrs. Loamford continued sobbing and murmuring, "After all I've done for you, after all I've done for you."

"I know what you've done for me," Dorothy went on.

"I appreciate it. But I've got to live my own life."

She became convinced that this was a masterly argument.

"I've got to live my own life. That's all."

Mrs. Loamford huddled up in the chair. Dorothy sat down and said nothing. Finally, Mrs. Loamford extricated herself from her chair, still uttering her whistling sob.

"I've lost my little girl!" she cried. "I've lost my little girl!"

She almost ran from the room.

Dorothy heard her enter her own room. A door slammed. Well, if her mother wanted to carry on like this, all right. It was time that she became aware of Dorothy's right to be herself. She ought to understand that Dorothy had her own life to live.

But this weeping wasn't comfortable. Dorothy had seen her mother distressed, angry, even mildly tearful—but never broken up. Perhaps she had shocked her. Perhaps it would be better to go to her mother and assure her that she hadn't meant—

She paced about restlessly and uncertainly. But, after all, what did she owe to her mother? Her father had left her all that was required for a musical career. Her progress had been the result of her own gifts, her own work. She had demonstrated that she was capable of standing on her own feet. Anyhow, her mother would get over it. She recalled how her mother had tried to chaperon her on various occasions. Her mother had insisted on being present at early interviews with Maxwell. It was absurd for an artist always to be seen with her mother. She had her own life to live.

Dorothy was surprised to find herself weeping. She powdered her face. Her mother had no right to get her

"Our Little Girl"

into this condition. Somebody must take her away. She would telephone to Arnold.

As she called for his number, she discovered that her voice sounded throaty and unsteady. She breathed deeply in the hope of restoring it to normal.

"Oh, Arnold," she heard herself saying, "you must take me out to dinner tonight. I simply must go out to dinner!"

Arnold agreed to anything that darling suggested.

"Oh—and come soon," she continued.

"I'll be right up."

"You're so good to me, Arnold!"

He was a nice boy.

And he let her live her own life,

XVII

AND A GOOD SONG RINGING CLEAR

Arnold proved to be unexpectedly averse to escorting Dorothy to Freron's sociable.

"I'll leave you there and call for you afterwards," he offered. "I don't belong in such parties. I don't fit in with a crowd of singers."

Mock modesty, Dorothy decided.

"You go!" she commanded. "You know you like to be the bright spot in all parties—and now you pretend you can't shine."

"But I'll be tired."

"You make *me* tired!"

The retort was biting, she thought.

She turned her back to Arnold and sulked, glancing at him quickly now and then to observe the effect of her posture. He surrendered without a struggle.

"All right, dear," he capitulated, "if you want me to go, I'll go. Anything for you."

She knew that she had trained him well.

It would be pleasant to go to Freron's with Arnold. He looked well and he talked well. People might not regard Arnold as a wit, but he certainly was clever. Once she had taken him with her to a concert given by a famous and obese coloratura.

"She ought to be good on the scales," had been Arnold's comment.

Worse jokes appeared in print.

Freron lived in the East Sixties, near Madison Avenue. Once this district had been the most fashionable in the

"Our Little Girl"

city. Homes of society celebrities still dotted the vicinity, but many one-time mansions had been turned into impromptu apartment houses and milliners had acquired the habit of occupying the lower floors of brownstone residences. Freron lived above a modiste. There was no elevator. You pushed the button below a battered card on which "Freron" had been scrawled. An inner door clicked and if you pushed it promptly you could march up three flights to Freron's rooms.

"Used to these walk-ups, aren't you?" remarked Dorothy as Arnold deftly opened the inner door at the first symptom of the hospitable rattling which indicated that Freron was receiving company.

"Oh, I've been about with climbers," said Arnold with an appreciative grin.

He really had a sense of humor.

On the fourth floor landing they were greeted by a small, dark gentleman with a careless moustache.

"I'm the reception committee," he announced. "Come in."

He led them into a tiny hall.

"Leave your wraps in the bedroom," he urged Dorothy.

Freron's bedroom was orange silk, with occasional deep blue trimmings. Several evening wraps had been tossed on a large bed, over which a batik canopy had been erected. Dorothy noted a few pictures—autographs of operatic folk, a little jar covered with sealing wax, in which lay a heap of cigarette stubs and ashes, and pieces of underclothing stretched on a chair. The air in the room was heavy and perfumed. Dorothy powdered her nose at an enormous mirror. She noticed that the semi-evening gown which she wore was unusually attractive in a revelatory way. Her mother had objected to it, but Dorothy had learned one thing: that sharp, decisive action cleared

And a Good Song Ringing Clear

away any objections that her mother might present. She smoothed her hair and surveyed the picture as a whole. It was good, Dorothy.

She met Arnold in the tiny hall.

"Now remember, I'm Miss Reitz."

He laughed and hung back.

"Come on!"

They entered the large, semi-circular studio, which looked like a public edition of the bedroom. A grand piano was draped in an orange and blue scarf, on which were little glasses, some of them not quite empty. Running almost the length of the room was a heavily cushioned window seat, from which French windows led to a little balcony. A few large chairs completed the inventory of the furniture.

Freron evidently was holding court in a comfortable seat near the centre of the room. The reception committee was sitting on one arm of the chair and a tall, pale, blond young man with twitching fingers on the other. A miscellaneous group was seated and stretched on the window-seat and on a tiger-skin rug near it. Freron arose as they entered.

"Children," she cried in a husky voice, waving at Arnold and Dorothy with the trailing end of the embroidered kimono she wore, "Miss Reitz and—what's his name, dear?"

"Mr. Deering."

"Mr. Deering," repeated Freron, with a smirk. "Dear Mr. Deering. One of you girls get hold of Mr. Deering and fix him up. Charlie, entertain Miss Reitz."

Charlie, a stout, red-haired youth, crawled from the window seat and took Dorothy's arm.

"Sit down and make yourself at home," he suggested, almost dragging her to the window seat.

"Our Little Girl"

A little blonde girl in a black, bare-backed gown with an incredibly short skirt had popped up from the tiger-skin and accosted Arnold.

"Hello, old man," she said, putting her arm about his shoulder. "Didn't think I'd see you again—not here, anyhow."

"Ah, you've met before!"

Freron's arm swept grandly about.

"Meeting of old friends."

She waved to Dorothy.

"Nice of you not to bring a total stranger. We're a little shy of strangers here. Make Charlie give you a drink."

Charlie needed no persuasion.

He filled a little glass on the piano from a bottle which had been deposited near the pedals.

"Thank you, no."

No use drinking this stuff, Dorothy thought. Evidently not a very refined crowd. She wished she hadn't come. They all seemed to be intoxicated more or less. Still, it wouldn't do to act prudish.

"Hell—this won't hurt you!"

Charlie suddenly slung an arm about her and brought the glass to her lips.

"Not now!"

She wrenched herself free and tried to freeze Charlie with a glance. Charlie's freezing point was remote. He wasn't so easily chilled into submission. He replaced his arm.

"Be a sport!"

She again slipped out of his embrace.

Charlie stood up.

"Come here, Eddie," he called to the pale blond young man on Freron's chair. "I need a little help."

And a Good Song Ringing Clear

Eddie shuffled to Dorothy.

"What—not drinking?"

He took the glass from Charlie's hand.

"Waste not—want not."

He swallowed the contents quickly.

"Now, aren't you sorry?"

It seemed to Dorothy as though all of them laughed uproariously at Eddie's little prank.

"No fair—no fair!" shouted Freron.

She jumped from her seat, pushing the reception committee to the floor. Long and continued laughter.

"You'll have your drink, dear," she said in a soothing voice to Dorothy.

Freron filled a little glass and handed it to Dorothy, who couldn't withdraw quickly enough to escape this offering. She filled another and held it up like Liberty illuminating the world.

"To Dorothy Reitz!" Freron cried out. "May her tribe increase!"

All crowded about the piano. The reception committee shoved the crowd away.

"One at a time," he insisted, dealing out glasses of a pinkish liquor as quickly as he could fill them.

Freron put her arm affectionately about Dorothy.

"To Dorothy Reitz!" she shouted.

Charlie swung his glass enthusiastically.

"Altogether!" he demanded, beating time.

"For she's a jolly good fellow,
For she's a jolly good fellow,
For she's a jolly good fe-el-low——"

Here a few glasses clinked and all of the pink liquor disappeared. Dorothy looked for a suitable place in which to spill her drink—but the eyes of Freron's guests were on her. She tried to swallow the stuff. It was bitter.

"Our Little Girl"

It scalded her throat and made her gulp. It left an odd, burning sensation in the chest. It wasn't like anything that she ever had tasted.

"Speech!"

Charlie was flapping his hands together.

"Speech!"

Before Dorothy knew what was happening, two of the young men had grasped her firmly and elevated her to a little table. This acrobatic feat brought a round of mirthful squeals and applause.

"Speech!"

Dorothy couldn't very well jump from the table. They were crowded too closely against it. She couldn't beg off. Who were they, anyhow? Freron was only an unimportant singer who for some unaccountable reason appeared at the Metropolitan once a year. The rest—well, why not humor them? They didn't mean anything, anyhow.

Where was Arnold? He was on the edge of the mob about the table, apparently trying to force his way to Dorothy's side. She saw a stout gentleman with a heavy gray moustache resent Arnold's efforts by the unusual manoeuvre of bringing a well-developed abdomen squarely against Arnold's body and thus creating a barrier. Arnold tried a flanking movement, only to be embraced firmly by the stout gentleman.

"For God's sake, ain't you goin' to say something?"

A thin soprano voice shrieked from the throng.

"Shut up and let her speak!"

Freron had restored order.

Poise—poise—poise. Poise would show them that Dorothy wasn't one of them.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she began, with what seemed to her a slightly sarcastic inflection.

"Oh, my God!" piped an effeminate masculine voice.

And a Good Song Ringing Clear

There was laughter, quickly silenced by Freron, who shook her fist at the interpolator.

"Go on, darling," she said.

"Ladies and gentlemen," continued Dorothy, curling her lip, as she thought, in fine scorn, "it's very kind of you to honor me in this way, and I thank you for——"

Suddenly she was dragged from the table by Charlie. She felt a moist smack on her face. She tried to push Charlie away.

"Get the hell out of here, Charlie," commanded Freron.

Charlie relinquished his hold on Dorothy and Freron pushed him into a chair.

The stout gentleman raised a ponderous oass to ask that he be kissed again. Finding no response for his lyric invitation, he made a bid for reciprocity by kissing Arnold violently. Arnold resisted the stout gentleman's ardors with a shove. The stout gentleman, not averse to battle, pugnaciously wrapped his long, thick arms about Arnold and carried him to the window seat. He dropped him there and sat on him.

"Sailor, beware,
Sailor, take care—
Many brave hearts are asleep——"

The stout gentleman boomed out the song, rocking back and forth over Arnold.

The little blonde girl rushed over to the basso and slapped him sharply across the cheeks and pulled his moustache.

"Lay off him!" she cried. "Where do you think you are?"

The stout gentleman transferred his attentions to his assailant. He resorted to his first principle: He enveloped her in his arms. Perhaps the little blonde girl had experienced similar tactics. At all events, she slipped one of

"Our Little Girl"

her attractive silky ankles back of the basso's imposing feet and tripped up her captor. He fell thumpingly into a sitting position and the little blonde girl pushed him over. She beat his head against the floor viciously.

"Leave my man alone, will you?" she screamed. "You lousy——"

And then Dorothy heard a rosary of pearls which she had read only in modern war fiction.

The altercation had taken from her the centre of the stage and she had abandoned her rostrum. The little blonde was embracing Arnold and stroking his hair.

"Did the big louse try to beat up my boy?" she cooed unsteadily. "Kiss mama and forget."

Arnold wriggled in her arms. Dorothy saw that he was looking at her dumbly. It wasn't a dignified situation. But why was the little blonde so maternal? She had met Arnold before—where—where could Arnold have met such a creature? He was a nice boy.

"Aw, kiss mama—don't pretend you don't want to."

Arnold tried to turn away.

"He doesn't kiss anybody but his wife," piped the effeminate masculine voice.

The crowd thought it an unusually funny remark.

The tinkle of the doorbell seemed to sober the party slightly. The blonde's grip on Arnold loosened, and he broke away from her. The reception committee went to the door. Dorothy saw an opportunity to get away during the reception of a newcomer.

"Let's get out, Arnold," she gasped.

Arnold nodded, and they managed to make their way to the little hall. Here they brushed into a dapper gentleman in evening clothes who escorted a monumental woman. As the pair crossed the threshold a cheer came from the party.

And a Good Song Ringing Clear

"Now, we'll have some jazz!" shrieked the little blonde, kicking out ecstatically. The dapper gentleman caught the extended leg and drew the blonde to him.

"Jazz is right, girl," he responded, gathering her to him and kissing her as he stroked her bare back.

"Ah—jazz!"

The basso seemed to have recovered from his mauling. He rushed to the monumental woman, and embraced her violently, although his arms hardly spanned her capacious torso.

"The more that I wait, the more that I live,
The more that I've got that I want to give,
Oh, honey, listen——"

Freron was singing and swaying about.

Arnold took Dorothy's arm and almost hurled her through the door into the hallway.

"I ain't had a man since I was sixteen——"

Freron's voice died out as they hurried down the stairs.

"God, what a party!" exclaimed Arnold, as he helped Dorothy into his car.

Dorothy suddenly found that her poise had come back. She was afraid that she had seemed ridiculously unsophisticated at Freron's gathering. Now she realized that Freron's group was only a collection of cheap creatures. Arnold had cut a silly figure. If he hadn't been there, she might have seemed less absurd. An artist could fit in anywhere. He needn't have permitted the intimacies which the little blonde had invited. The little blonde certainly had devoted herself to Arnold.

"You didn't seem to have such a terrible time," Dorothy remarked. "That blonde girl——"

"It was disgusting," muttered Arnold.

She felt that he was reproaching her for taking him to Freron's.

"Our Little Girl"

"Disgusting!"

She laughed.

"What are you laughing at?" he demanded. "Did you enjoy it up there on the table?"

She laughed again.

"It didn't mean anything."

"Didn't mean anything!"

His voice became tense.

"Have you been to many of these things?" he demanded cuttingly.

"I have not," she snapped. "But I guess you have."

"What are you getting at?" he asked curtly.

"Getting at?" she mocked. "That blonde girl was no stranger to you."

In the flickering light of the streets she was sure that she saw him flush.

"I—I met her once—somewhere—I don't remember——"

"You don't remember?"

She laughed wickedly.

"I think you'd remember *that* girl. She certainly had no trouble remembering you!"

Arnold grunted. He was watching a faltering car ahead of him.

"Got anything to say?" taunted Dorothy.

Arnold grunted again.

"You heard me," she insisted.

"Excuse me—did you say something?"

"If I'm not worth listening to, I won't repeat."

She settled back in her seat and looked out at the street. Arnold wouldn't play fast and loose with *her*! She wondered why she wasn't surprised or shocked to discover that Arnold had known such people and known them, Heaven knows how well. Most young men were like that,

And a Good Song Ringing Clear

even the nice ones. But she wouldn't have suspected Arnold guilty of the blonde. Probably he hadn't committed any great indiscretion, at that. He was nice in many senses. Well, she'd make him explain. It would be good for him.

Arnold drove on moodily up Fifth Avenue, across town, and drew up at the Loamford house. Dorothy opened the door of the car and started up the stairs. Arnold followed her.

"Well?" he remarked.

"Well?" she mimicked.

She looked at him in an amused way as he stood there, leaning against the stone railing. He was an attractive boy. His light gray overcoat fitted well. He looked prosperous without appearing vulgar. He had rather nice eyes. Oh, that was an old story! With all that, he seemed like a frightened but sulky little boy. He was so simple.

"If you haven't anything more to say," she suggested coolly, "we might as well say good night."

She opened the outer door.

"You have my keys?"

Arnold made a gesture of despair.

"Now please, Dot—don't let's part like this."

"Like what?"

She smiled teasingly, her hands on her hips, her body swaying ever so gently in a Carmenesque rhythm.

"You know—you know that girl doesn't mean anything to me."

"I'd hope you had better taste. A cheap little thing. I'm glad she doesn't."

Her tone was playful.

"And I suppose she never did!"

Arnold fidgeted.

"No," he said slowly, "she—oh, what are you getting at, anyhow?"

"Our Little Girl"

"Nothing," she snapped. "My keys, please."

He handed her the keys.

"Thank you. Good night."

He reached for her hand.

"Good night."

She stepped away from him.

He snatched her hands.

"Please listen to me, Dot," he pleaded. "I don't know why you're acting this way. I can't understand it. I met that girl once when I was at college—that's all. She isn't anything to me. Say you still love me."

She withdrew her hands from his grasp.

"She may not be anything to you—but were you anything to her?"

Arnold seemed staggered.

"I don't see why you ask—I don't know how you can ask——"

He suddenly flared up.

"You're just trying to make a fool of me!"

"Nature saved me that trouble," she replied glibly, according to tradition.

"All right—if that's the way you feel about it."

He turned anxiously and moodily.

"A very clear and satisfactory explanation, I'm sure," she commented. "Good night."

"Oh, hell—good night!"

Arnold stamped his foot angrily, looked at her once more as though he expected some answer, and then, seeing that she was opening the door quickly and stepping inside, marched down the steps. He waited for a moment in his car. He saw the light in the hallway go out. Petulantly he drove away his car as noisily as possible, looking back all the while.

Dorothy laughed as she entered her room. The poor

And a Good Song Ringing Clear

boy had made such an ass of himself. It was almost too bad that she hadn't thought of saying something about breaking off the engagement. At any rate, she had shown him that she had a mind of her own. Perhaps she had appeared weak at the party—but the party was already half forgotten. Arnold certainly had looked foolish in the arms of the little blonde girl—the filthy little beast! And she had known him before, had she? Why hadn't Dorothy slapped the brat's face?

She looked quizzically at the picture of Arnold, his arms folded and an abnormally wide smile on his face, which reposed on her dressing table.

"You *have* got a temper," she murmured, "but you're a nice boy. A little simple. Oh, well—you'll get over it."

XVIII

THE GREATEST OF THESE IS CHARITY

Dorothy half expected an apologetic note from Arnold, delivered by special messenger, to be awaiting her the next morning at breakfast. He had been ridiculous last night. Probably the little blonde girl was no more than a passing acquaintance, yet Arnold had behaved like a child. Men were only grown-up children, anyhow. They seemed guilty even when they were innocent. He was a nice boy—perhaps it hadn't been right to torture him. He meant well. Ought she to telephone to say that she had been teasing him? Maybe she ought, but what would be the use? It might make him conceited. Men were conceited enough as they were.

The apologetic note was not in evidence, but the telephone rang before she had sipped her orange juice. She jumped up, and then thought better of answering.

"Answer it, mother," she ordered.

"It's probably for you, Dorothy," protested Mrs. Loamford.

"It probably is. That's why it's better for some one else to answer."

She waved a spoon prophetically.

"Artists," she remarked, "shouldn't be at the beck and call of anyone who chooses to ring up."

Her mother rose wearily and went to the telephone in the pantry. She returned immediately with an expression of disgust.

"Of course it's for you!"

She lapsed into her chair.

The Greatest of These Is Charity

"You'd think everyone was here to wait on you."

Dorothy left her place grandly.

"Now, mother dear," she said, kissing her mother carefully, "you mustn't be so temperamental. I simply can't talk to everyone who rings up for some trifle. Who is it?"

"I didn't ask," muttered Mrs. Loamford testily.

Dorothy clenched her fists and raised them with a hopeless air.

"Oh! how many times must I tell you to ask who it is!"

She stamped to the telephone.

Harper was calling. He announced that the bureau had booked a concert for Dorothy and that she was to come down as soon as possible. The recital was to be at Basswood, N. Y., tonight. They would tell her details. Make it snappy.

Dorothy was thrilled. This could be the beginning of a tour. She skipped merrily back to the dining-room.

"Pack my things quickly, mother," she called out, "I have to sing tonight."

"Sing tonight? Where?"

"Out of town. Now, don't ask me any questions. I have to hurry down to my manager. Just pack my white net evening dress. I can't stop to talk now."

"But where are you singing?"

"Basswood."

"I never heard of the place."

"Oh—it's a big musical centre. Something like that."

It was a quick trip to the Underwood Concert Corporation. The taxi driver was astounded at receiving two dollar bills and seeing his client leap into a hallway without waiting for change. In the elevator Dorothy recovered her poise. It wouldn't do to appear anxious or too eager. After all, she was an established artist. Doubtless there

"Our Little Girl"

had been demands for recitals. It was the beginning of things.

Harper greeted her in his customary uproarious style.

"Well, here's the little lady!" he cried out, as though Dorothy's arrival were a bit of good news. "Glad you came."

He waited for her to sit down, and then he addressed her emphatically and seriously.

"Got a date for you tonight. Basswood, N. Y. It's about an hour up the Hudson. One of those society places. Here's the dope. I'm going to let you in on the facts. You're not one of these silly kids you can't tell the truth to. Here it is. They're having a benefit concert out there tonight for some institution—a charity of some kind. Now, to be frank with you, we'd booked Freron for the show, but she's got a busted larynx or a sprained tongue or one of those diseases. They want somebody else who can give a recital and I thought this would be a swell chance for you. Just give them any old program. They don't know one note from another, anyhow. We'd hired Goldstein to play this job, so you won't need a rehearsal. He'll meet you at Grand Central at six and they'll give you dinner out there. That's all."

He looked up impressively.

"And you'll be in a nice fresh one-hundred-dollar bill at the end of the evening. Doesn't that listen good?"

Dorothy thought that it listened good, but it wasn't proper to reflect Harper's enthusiasm.

"It's very short notice," she observed. "I don't know whether I can do myself justice."

"Hell with justice," remarked Harper. "All you do is sing. Pardon my French, girlie. You're a good sport to take the date like this. A lot of these fancy singers would rear like a broncho if you sprung it on 'em at the last

The Greatest of These Is Charity

minute. Now, you know Goldstein. He's got the tickets. He knows the ropes. He's played out there before. All you've got to do is land there and make good. And I know damn well you'll do that."

Dorothy smiled patronizingly. Harper was a rough sort but he meant well. She would be glad to accommodate him.

"I suppose I'll be going on a tour soon," she suggested.

"Now, you'll hear a lot about people going on tours. Read the musical papers and you'll see Madame Whozit's on tour and Miss Whynot's on tour and all that. Most of those tours consist of one consecutive performance, or maybe two recitals in succession, a month apart. But trust us. We're sending out lots of dope on you and we ought to get a couple of nibbles. By the way, don't sing too much highbrow stuff tonight. They like to have their ears tickled out there."

"A few light encores? Certainly."

She stood up and surveyed Harper.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Harper. I'll be in again next week, perhaps, if I happen to be downtown."

The protests of Mrs. Loamford against Dorothy's unaccompanied trip to the station and her suggestions that some persons known to her escort Dorothy to Basswood were overruled sharply. Dorothy was an artist and artists didn't need nurses. Anyhow, there was Goldstein, and who could be safer than Goldstein? Socially, Goldstein was as steady as he was professionally. He said little and contented himself with offering Dorothy a copy of a magazine which he had read. Dorothy wondered what Basswood would be like—and then she remembered that Arnold had not yet communicated with her. Probably he was calling up tearfully at this very hour. Fortunate that this engagement had turned up at this time. It would show

"Our Little Girl"

Arnold that Dorothy was quite capable of getting along without him. He ought to be worried. It would be good for him.

She looked out of the train at the little Hudson towns. There were lights in the houses, and here and there figures were coming home from work. She wondered whether they knew who was on the train passing through. Was Basswood a town like these? Possibly it would be better not to sing old French songs at the yokels. But what was the difference? There was nothing to be gained by being undignified and playing to uncultivated tastes. She looked at the magazine which Goldstein had passed to her. She opened a page at random.

"A reorganization of Watertight Copper," she read, "has materially strengthened the make-up of this organization and improves the technical position of the preferred and raises the common to an excellent business man's investment."

Whatever it was about, it was nonsense. That was like Goldstein, reading a magazine about common stock on his way to a concert. He was a good piano player but he had no soul. She handed the magazine back to him.

"Thanks," he said, and stuffed it into his pocket.

"Know where you're going?" he inquired rather suddenly.

She raised her eyebrows for an explanation.

"Didn't tell you, did they? Basswood Country Club. Benefit for Basswood Home for Feeble-Minded. Society audience. Dumb. Applaud anything. Do what you like."

He pulled the magazine out of his pocket and renewed his studies of Watertight Copper and business men's investments.

A benefit for the feeble-minded! Dorothy was tempted to withdraw on the spot, except that one can't withdraw

The Greatest of These Is Charity

very far on a moving train. So this was the kind of engagement they were giving her! No wonder Freron had a sprained tongue or whatever it was! A strange place to send an artist. She would announce on her arrival that she had been sent here on false pretences and that it would be impossible for her to sing. They could make the best of it. Maxwell and Harper would hear of this. She would find another manager. There were other bureaus—and they wouldn't send artists to benefits for the feeble-minded.

"Basswood," remarked Goldstein, tossing his magazine under the seat and rising. "Car to meet us. Mrs. Dalton. Talks. Nice enough, though. Good dinner."

Dorothy was about to denounce everything to Goldstein, but one simply couldn't talk to a stick like that. It was terrible what artists had to put up with!

Mrs. Dalton, a heavy, white-haired woman with a perpetual smile, stood on the platform at the Basswood station to greet them. She welcomed Goldstein effusively, and turned to Dorothy with a benign grin. There would have been nothing surprising if she had kissed Dorothy, but Dorothy remained out of osculating distance.

"Oh, I'm so glad to meet you!" exclaimed Mrs. Dalton in a voice that seemed like a cheerful sigh. "We were so disappointed that dear Madame Freron couldn't come, but everyone was so nice about it. When we announced who would sing in her place hardly anyone asked for their money back. It's all for a good cause, you know."

Dorothy didn't like this voluble woman. She didn't know how to receive an artist. What did she care who wanted his money back?

"My car's waiting for you," continued Mrs. Dalton, "and Mr. Dalton doesn't like his dinner cold. So we'll go right up to my house now. Do jump in, my dear."

"Our Little Girl"

Dorothy didn't have to jump because Mrs. Dalton almost tossed her into the limousine.

"Maybe Mr. Goldstein would prefer to sit with the driver," she hinted joyfully. "He and Bennett ought to be such good friends. You remember Mr. Goldstein, don't you, Bennett?"

Bennett, who looked like a blacklisted pugilist, lifted his cap sourly and grunted a greeting. Goldstein settled in the front seat and edged as far as possible away from the chauffeur.

"We're so glad you came," Mrs. Dalton burred. "We were afraid there wouldn't be anybody, and you don't know how I hate to postpone anything. You'll be delighted with the hall. We had Madame Freron last year and she said she never sang in any place which had such wonderful acoustics. And we are such music lovers in Basswood. The best is none too good for us. I'm sorry you can't hear our Orpheus Club. We tried to get the girls together to help out when we heard that Madame Freron couldn't come, but some of them had other arrangements. But I'm sure we'll all be delighted with your recital. Mr. Maxwell said such good things about you."

Dorothy was still. It would be out of place for her to enter into a lively conversation with this incessant orator.

"Are you tired, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Dalton anxiously. "You haven't said a word."

"How could I?" snapped Dorothy.

She recovered herself instantly.

"We singers must save our voices," she explained.

"I have often wondered," commented Mrs. Dalton, who apparently had overlooked Dorothy's repartee, "whether I could not have made a success as a concert singer. When I hear some of the artists, I feel sure I could have made quite a career. But it must be such a taxing life!"

The Greatest of These Is Charity

She shook her head in contemplation of the taxing life.

"Very," assented Dorothy.

"Tomorrow, I suppose," supposed Mrs. Dalton, "you'll be singing somewhere else—and then the day after somewhere else again—I don't envy you."

Her perpetual smile took on a spiritual angle.

"But it's all for art, isn't it?" she ruminated.

Dorothy nodded sagely.

Bennett stopped the car rather abruptly at the Dalton residence, a large white stucco house. He opened the door and held it while Mrs. Dalton and Dorothy emerged. Goldstein jumped out and lit a cigarette.

Mrs. Dalton led Dorothy and her accompanist to the house, where Mr. Dalton, a thick-set little man with a nervous manner, was waiting.

"How do you do?" he said.

That was the extent of his conversation. Dorothy thought that he outdid Goldstein in taciturnity. The dinner, as predicted, was excellent. Mrs. Dalton, as anticipated, spoke over it rather than ate it. She confined herself chiefly to the great good that the Basswood Home for the Feeble-Minded was doing and how difficult it was to make both ends meet, especially as the number of persons adjudged feeble-minded seemed to be growing daily. It was the war that had done it. It had called attention to the prevalence of feeble-mindedness. Many people were used to consider criminal or depraved were merely feeble-minded and had to be taken care of medically rather than legally. Most people needed a doctor, not a policeman. It was surprising how nice and even how intelligent feeble-minded people were when you treated them as such. They were training a feeble-minded girl now to be an opera singer. What a pity it was past the girl's bedtime and that Dorothy couldn't hear her!

"Our Little Girl"

Sociological considerations occupied Mrs. Dalton's mind and Dorothy's ears until Mrs. Dalton recalled that there was to be a concert. With incredible efficiency she bundled her husband, Goldstein and Dorothy into the limousine and ordered Bennett to speed to the country club. It was fine of the country club to put its dance hall at the disposal of the Home for concerts. It showed that there was not a frivolous side only to people in Basswood. They always recollected that in the midst of life there was feeble-mindedness, and they permitted two of their dances each year to be preceded by concerts in aid of the Home. One concert was a volunteer affair, arranged locally, but the other always enlisted the services of a big star. It was such a pity that dear Madame Freron couldn't be with them again this year but it was nice that Dorothy could come in her place.

The harangue continued until Dorothy and Goldstein were placed behind a little door leading to an impromptu platform on which an upright piano had been placed.

"Now, just a minute while I introduce you," said Mrs. Dalton, as she stepped on the platform, which creaked soulfully. There was a hush in the giggling crowd as Mrs. Dalton advanced to the edge of the platform and held up her hand for silence.

"My friends," she said in a booming voice, "my good friends, as many of you know there is a disappointment in store for us tonight. Our good friend, Madame Freron, is indisposed and so will not be able to be with us. However,"—the perpetual smile widened—"we have had the good fortune to secure another artist who is known to many of you. This young woman recently gave a wonderful concert at Aeolian Hall in New York City. Think of that! Aeolian Hall in New York City! She is greatly interested in our work for the improvement of the

The Greatest of These Is Charity

feeble-minded and I am sure she will please all of us. After the concert, the ushers will hand you our annual report of the work of the Home and I know you will all be impressed with the progress we have made. As you know, the Home is always open to you and we shall be glad to have any or all of you visit there at any time. And now, as the hour is growing late, it is my privilege to introduce Miss Dorothy Reitz, soprano, and her accompanist, Mr. DeWitt Goldstein, whom many of you will remember as the young man who played so beautifully for Madame Freron last year." (Applause.)

Dorothy saw before her rows of athletic young folks, placed uncomfortably in camp chairs, which, according to the printed program, were supplied by courtesy of Palmer & Sons, Undertakers and Embalmers, Basswood, N. Y. She didn't feel the isolation which had come to her on the platform at Aeolian Hall. She rather wished that it were all over. Her Italian group passed off quietly. There was a little patter of applause and a great scraping of chairs as the auditors tried to adjust themselves to these unwonted seats. As Dorothy came on for her second group, she heard strange sounds from a far corner. She saw a group of men with musical instruments unloading their paraphernalia. A large drum bore the legend "'One Round Marks' Harmony Kings." The clarinet player started to roulade on his instrument, and three ushers were called in consultation until he was dissuaded from continuing his efforts. Then the recital proceeded.

It was a dull concert, she thought. There was little hand-clapping and a great deal of chair-shuffling after each group. The thought of encores hardly occurred to her, but every now and then Goldstein would start back to the platform with a piece of music and she would sing

"Our Little Girl"

an additional number. As she finished her last scheduled song, the chairs became even more agitated than before, and Mr. Marks' Harmony Kings obviously prepared to ascend their thrones on the platform. Then Mrs. Dalton stepped on the stage.

"My dear friends," she said, "I am sure we are all greatly obliged to Miss Reitz for her lovely program. It is a privilege to hear such a fine program. But before we break up for dancing, there is one thought that I must leave with you. We are not the only ones who have benefited by this concert. As we are grateful to Miss Reitz, so there are many in the Home who are grateful to her, though they cannot say so in person. I am glad to report that this concert has netted a goodly sum for the Home and I wish, in behalf of the committee, the Home, and its tenants, to thank Miss Reitz." (Applause.)

Mrs. Dalton dragged Dorothy out for a bow and kissed her. It was inevitable.

"And now, my dear," she said, "wouldn't you like to dance with some of our fine young men?"

"I'm so tired," demurred Dorothy. "You don't know what a strain a recital is."

Mrs. Dalton nodded sympathetically.

"I understand. And now, I have a little surprise for you—in addition to the check, which I have handed to Mr. Goldstein. Bennett is waiting outside to take you and Mr. Goldstein back to the city."

"That's very kind of you."

"There's no train out of here until three o'clock," explained Mrs. Dalton. "We shall be honored to have you go to New York in our car."

Mrs. Dalton led her to the automobile and stood on the clubhouse steps, waving until the car was out of sight.

"Fun, wasn't it?" commented Goldstein.

The Greatest of These Is Charity

"Awful, awful," murmured Dorothy.

He was such a stick!

"See what they hand you next."

Goldstein leaned back with a grin, lit a cigarette, and stared out of the window the rest of the way. Dorothy found herself in a dreary doze.

"Tell him where you live," said Goldstein.

She gave Bennett her address. He grunted and drove rapidly down Broadway and across 88th Street. Goldstein opened the door for her and escorted her up the steps.

"Wish me luck," he said, as he started back to the car.

"And why?"

"This fellow Bennett—he's a graduate of the Basswood Home. Good night!"

XIX

MAN PROPOSES

There was no apologetic note from Arnold awaiting Dorothy on her return from the altruistic precincts of Basswood, nor had there been any effort to reach her on the telephone. What was Arnold trying to do? Had he come to the conclusion that he could outdo her in a battle of silence? It wouldn't be of any use, if that were his plan. She certainly wouldn't make the first move to restore relations. For that matter relations weren't so fearfully strained. They had had a little tiff. She had teased him—perhaps a bit more than she should have. But certainly he could stand a little chaffing. On the other hand, he had departed in a mean temper. He had shown an ungracious disposition. It was for him to say the first word.

The morning passed without any message from Arnold. Dorothy decided that she could get along without him if he could get along without her. Perhaps he thought that he had a monopoly on her! He would soon realize the fallacy of that idea! What could he do, anyhow? They were engaged. If he stayed away long, there would be talk. Well, let him stay away. It would be all the more humiliating for him on his return.

Her mother's inquiries about the concert were answered briefly and vaguely. It had been a great success, certainly. No, she hadn't been nervous. There had been plenty of applause. Yes, she had looked well. Yes, people had commented on her gown. Yes—oh, why must one ask so many questions? One concert was a good deal

like the next. Why must one quiz her as though she had never before sung in public?

Dorothy left the house moodily and took a taxi to the Underwood offices. There was a check waiting for her there. Not that she needed the check. The money meant nothing to her. Still it showed that she was an artist of definite value. Probably there would be other engagements, and there might be reviews. She was anxious to see what the Basswood journals had written about her. Of course, it didn't matter what they said, but a reprint of favorable criticisms would look well in the *Musical Cosmos*. Advertising in the *Cosmos* was expensive, but one had to do it. She would spend her check on an advertisement. Possibly they would print her picture on the cover. Less important artists had smiled at the public from the *Cosmos*.

"Well, you knocked 'em for a gool in Basswood," commented Harper, as she entered his office. "Tommy's got some reviews in there. Take a look at 'em. They'll make you feel like the Queen of Sheba."

He agreed that this might be an opportune time to advertise.

"Make it easier to get you dates for next year," he explained.

Next year! Why not this year? It might be well enough to hold off an unknown artist. But she had given a New York recital which had been received with praise, and her success in Basswood had been quite beautiful in spite of the difficult conditions.

"But why not now?" she demanded. "The public knows me now. They might forget me by next year."

"It takes time, girlie."

Time, time, time. She was tired of hearing that things took time. Either she was an artist whom the public

"Our Little Girl"

wanted to hear or she wasn't. And she was. It might be well to take another and more enterprising manager.

"Look here, Mr. Harper," she said sharply. "I'm not quite a beginner."

Harper held up his hand deprecatingly.

"I know that as well as you do, little lady," he observed. "But the public do not."

She stared at him angrily.

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded. "It's your business to see that the public knows me. They *do* know me! I don't know, I can't understand why you want me to keep in the background. I may not be as famous as some of your imported stars, but——"

She stopped. She knew that it would be more effective not to express the implication.

Harper took her hand soothingly. She tore it away.

"Don't try to treat me like a child!"

She measured the distance to the door.

"If you want to take care of my interests in a business-like way," she announced, "I wish you'd do it. If you don't care to, say so, and I'll find a manager who will."

"Now keep your temper," he counseled with a smile.

"I haven't lost it," she snapped.

"I'm glad to hear that," he murmured.

Sarcasm. She wouldn't stand for that from him. Who was he, anyhow? Just a rough and ready proletarian who had somehow drifted into this business. He belonged with—with a circus.

"Oh, very well," she concluded, tightening her gloves. "I don't see why we should discuss things further."

He bowed ironically.

"Don't forget to look at your clippings," he suggested.

She considered this unworthy of acknowledgment. He wasn't a gentleman. From the outset he had called

her "girlie," "little lady," and other appellatives which might be considered affectionate, but certainly not appropriate. Artists weren't "girlie." A cheap woman like Freron might be addressed in such fashion, but not a serious singer.

She closed the door behind her with more decision than was necessary to fasten it, and marched out past the switchboard. Then she recalled the clippings. It would be a victory for Harper if she inspected them. Still, he might not know about it. He couldn't see her go into the Press Department. She opened the door to Tommy's premises and walked in.

Tommy evidently was both cheerful and depressed. He greeted her pleasantly, but his voice sounded sad.

"Nice reviews from Basswood, Dot," he said.

She wondered whether Tommy ought to be permitted to call her "Dot." "Girlie" would be next.

The Basswood *Globe* and the Basswood *Advocate* agreed on few topics except Dorothy Reitz.

"We have heard few such charming singers," the *Globe* told its readers, "as Dorothy Reitz, the lovely prima donna who sang at the Country Club last night in aid of the Basswood Home for the Feeble-Minded in place of Mme. Freron of the Metropolitan Opera House, whose recital of last year will be recalled with pleasure by all music lovers of Basswood. Miss Reitz was an able substitute and sang so well that the disappointment at not hearing Mme. Freron was dissipated in the sunshine of her tones and personality. Miss Reitz is a beautiful young woman and a great artist, and those who did not hear her missed a treat which will long be remembered."

The *Advocate* indorsed the *Globe's* view by reprinting the biography which adorned the Underwood bureau's circular on Dorothy Reitz.

"Our Little Girl"

"They're good enough," said Dorothy, as she dropped the cuttings on the desk. "I had a fine success."

"I'm glad you did."

Was Tommy mocking her, too? She looked quickly at him, but she could find no trace of irony in his features.

"I really am, Dot," he continued, evidently feeling her suspicion. "I wish you'd have lunch with me today."

Normally she would have declined. She hadn't lunched with any man except Arnold since her engagement. Come to think of it, Tommy knew nothing of her relations with Arnold. It didn't matter. Tommy must have been pretty well in love with her at one time. Lately, he had been brisk and cool. Today he seemed more like the Tommy who had always tried to make an impression. He was sweet—so was Arnold, but Tommy was sweet in a different way. He was really an innocent young thing.

"I'm very busy," she said, "but if you're going out right now, perhaps I can arrange it."

Tommy deposited the telephone over the collection of clippings and typed sheets on his desk.

"Let's go."

He took her to a chop house near Broadway. Over an unseasonable assortment of salads, he chatted of press notices and recitals. He was much the same Tommy He liked to retail his experiences. He knew his business.

"It's curious," he said suddenly altering his tone, "how things have changed since I met you. I must have been a very impressionable youngster then. I don't suppose you remember the first story I ever wrote about you—I never thought then that I'd be making a living writing about you, as I am now. I personified you as the Thursday Night Girl. Of course, I was wrong about that. I was

wrong about a lot of things then. I suppose I always will be. I must have made an awful fool of myself sometimes."

He paused and smiled.

"I don't expect you to say anything. It wouldn't be polite for you to agree and probably you do."

"No, Tommy."

It was very prima-donna-like. That "No, Tommy," she thought, carried with it a wealth of sympathy and yet expressed an appreciation of his professional virtues.

"Anyhow," he went on, "things have changed. In those days it was hard for me to refrain from proposing to you on the spot. I simply couldn't. I wasn't in a position to marry. I wasn't making anything. And now, it's different. They've put me under contract for three years at a salary that would surprise you. Maybe it wouldn't surprise you——"

He grinned.

"Don't get me wrong, Dot. I mean that it would surprise you to hear that they were paying that much for what I do. It surprised me, I know."

"That's very nice, I'm sure," she remarked cordially.

Still prima donna. Perhaps she oughtn't to be quite so patronizing, but after all, she was now an artist, and he was a press-agent. The words "press-agent" had a shoddy connotation. A press-agent couldn't possibly be on the same level with the subjects of his labors.

"Things are simpler than they used to be," he resumed. "I used to walk all around Central Park to get to the corner. Now I simply go to the corner. I'm at a corner now, Dot."

He pushed aside a cup of coffee, and extinguished his cigarette against the saucer.

"It's simply this, Dot. You know all about me—at

"Our Little Girl"

least I think you do. You may have guessed how I feel about you. I've spilled it often enough, even when I was trying to act up to cover it. And so—and so consider that I've proposed to you. Because I have."

This was entertaining. Tommy proposing! Tommy renewing unexpectedly his almost forgotten advances. What a child he was! He would have to be treated gently yet firmly. She laughed.

"Tommy, my dear boy," she said, with a giggle that seemed not at all incompatible with her dignity, "you mustn't say such things."

"But I mean it," he pleaded. "I'm not saying 'such things.' I mean it, Dot."

A singularly weak speech, she thought.

"I'm sorry if you do," she said, "because I'm not thinking of any such thing. You shouldn't either. You're a nice boy, Tommy, and I like you and I appreciate what you've done for me, but really——"

The pause was an adequate finale.

"Maybe you think I'm not serious, Dot," Tommy argued. "If I ever meant anything in my life, I mean this. Do you think it's been easy for me to plug away at this publicity thing, slaving ten or twelve hours a day and Sunday sometimes? I could have got along freelancing, writing a little here and a little there—just enough to keep myself. But I've been working and trying to make good just so that I could—don't you understand it?"

She was sorry for him. She was sorry—and pleased. It wasn't the speech of a confirmed proposer. Tommy was baring his soul. Of course, it was impossible. What an absurd husband he would make! And then there was Arnold. Ought she to tell him about Arnold? Arnold! She hadn't heard from him for several days. She wouldn't mention Arnold to Tommy. She wouldn't mention him anyhow.

Tommy was looking at her pleadingly. He had said all that he could. He turned toward her expectantly, but his eyes reflected defeat. She had an impulse to stroke his hand, to tell him to forget. She omitted the gesture. *Prima donna.*

"Now, don't make things difficult for me, please," she said, "or for you. I believe you, Tommy—really. But I simply don't——" She was about to say that she didn't feel "that way" about him, but it wasn't what one would say to Tommy.

"Forget about it," she continued. "You shouldn't have thought of it in the first place, but forget about it. **You** know so many nice girls——"

Tommy waved his hand agitatedly.

"That has nothing to do with it," he insisted. "I don't feel about them as I do about you, Dot."

She recalled the evening on which she had seen Tommy atop a bus, caressing Rose Manning.

"Not even Rose Manning?"

She delivered the question coolly, almost mockingly, effectively.

Tommy flushed.

"No, not even——"

He couldn't say the name.

"It's only you, Dot," he reiterated.

He could say no more.

She smiled sweetly and consolingly.

"And now we'll forget it," she said. "I really appreciate the compliment. We can still be friends."

Tommy looked tired. He stared at the ashes on the saucer. Finally he looked up.

"Would you like dessert?"

She shook her head.

"I can't eat any more," he said.

“Our Little Girl”

He said nothing as he paid the check and escorted her out of the chop house. On the street she indicated that she was going uptown.

“Thank you so much,” she said.

She held out her hand. It was a noble gesture.

“Good-bye. I’ll see you again at the office, I suppose.”

Tommy took her hand and held it absent-mindedly.

“There isn’t—there isn’t anybody else?” he asked faintly.

She laughed.

“What a question! Why should there be anybody else?”

“I thought there might be—there might be——”

“Oh, really,” he almost cried out, “there *is* somebody else, isn’t there?”

What would be the use of telling him about Arnold? What a child he was, anyhow. He would cry in another minute.

“No,” she answered jauntily, “there isn’t.”

He seemed to brighten.

“Then, perhaps——”

“I wouldn’t, if I were you.”

He shrugged his shoulders despairingly.

“Forgive me for boring you,” he said dimly.

“Oh, don’t feel that way about it. I like you, Tommy. I really like you. Only—well, you’ll understand some day, if you don’t now.”

Tommy tipped his hat and slouched down the street. She pitied him again. But why should she pity him? Was it her fault that men fell in love with her? She noticed a man lounging beside a news-stand gaping at her as she hailed a taxicab. Another Tommy. A less respectable Tommy, perhaps, but another Tommy. And yet that verdict wasn’t fair to Tommy. He had a certain

charm at his best. But what was his best? Whatever it was, it didn't attract her. He was a boy, even if he was several years older than she was. So was Arnold—but not so much a boy. This conceit pleased her. It pleased her almost as much as her ankles, which compared favorably with the standardized ankles of the hosiery advertisements.

As the car drew up in front of her home, she saw another car standing at the curb—Arnold's car. He had come to surrender. She smiled brilliantly as she gave the driver a prodigal tip.

"Mr. Deering has been waiting in the parlor for two hours," whispered Lena, as Dorothy entered the house.

"Tell him I'll see him in a little while," ordered Dorothy, as she tripped upstairs. Costume changes were always effective. She framed her entrance as she slipped on a semi-evening dress which concealed revealingly.

She would greet him politely but distantly. He would begin to stutter and to apologize. She would be cool. He would grow warmer. She would demand an explanation—but without expressing it in so many words. He would confess his rudeness, his boorishness, his unworthiness—and she would forgive him with a smile and a kiss. He was a sweet man.

Arnold jumped to his feet as she swept into the parlor.

"So sorry you had to wait," she drawled. "It's a very unexpected visit."

She sat on a couch. It would be better to recline on it wearily. She did.

"Dot," said Arnold, approaching her, "you can't imagine how terrible I feel. I feel like—like a brute."

Excellent.

"I'm so sorry," she murmured.

“Our Little Girl”

It was a most successful answer.

“Oh, don’t look at me that way!” he begged. “I’ve done wrong. I was mean the other night. I wasn’t myself. I was everything I shouldn’t have been. I can’t excuse myself. All I can do is ask you to forgive me.”

“Why did it take you three days to ask?” she inquired.

“Oh, Dot——”

He knelt beside the couch and took her hand. She didn’t resist.

“I was so ashamed. I felt so terrible, I started to write. I couldn’t. I wanted to phone. I couldn’t have told you over the phone. I couldn’t bear to come at first. Then I couldn’t stand being away from you any longer. Honest, Dot, I haven’t slept a wink since that night. I——”

He broke down and kissed her hand.

She put her arm about his head with a splendid, forgiving embrace.

“I know, Arnold,” she said quietly. “I know.”

Prima donna. She wondered what she knew, but she was saying the right thing. And then came the inspiration.

“Maybe I was as much to blame——”

He kissed her madly.

“Never! Never!” he cried. “It was all my fault. It was all my fault! I was a brute!”

He sobbed as he spoke. Then he quieted down.

“You’re the most wonderful girl in all the world,” he said, as though he were praying. “I know I’m not worthy of you—but—but—Dot, let’s get married soon.”

She kissed him tenderly. It was a beautiful victory.

“Yes, dear.”

“Oh, don’t be so kind to me!”

Arnold was getting very dramatic.

“You’re too good to me.”

He reached into the recesses of his vest pocket and brought out a little package.

"Here's something for you," he said simply.

The ring. It was nice of Arnold. It was sweet of him. And it was a gorgeous ring.

"You're too good, Arnold."

She kissed him, and he embraced her.

"No—you're too good," he insisted, tearfully. "You're too good, too beautiful. Let's—let's get married soon."

She nodded, as she gazed at the ring.

"Next month?"

She might as well. She wanted him now. She would have married him on the spot, had he asked it. She kissed him. It wasn't necessary to say anything in assent.

"We'll announce it at once."

He kissed her endlessly, it seemed. She liked his kisses. His caresses were soothing and pleasing. There was something vital about him, something that drew her to him, something that she couldn't explain that thrilled her. She would be his wife soon—but she felt like something better than a wife. "Wife" was too domestic. She would be his married mistress. Now she could only clasp him and return his kisses. After they were married—a little shiver of delight ran over her.

"Let's tell mother Loamford," he said.

There was a world of tenderness in that "mother Loamford." Arm in arm they went into the sitting-room, where Mrs. Loamford was studying the society columns in her evening papers. Arnold kissed her and told her the news.

"My boy! my boy!" she cried out, returning his kiss with many more.

"My little Dorothy! My baby! Oh, this is the happiest moment of my life!" It was the end of a perfect day.

XX

HERE COMES THE BRIDE

Since the death of Mr. Loamford there had been no such festal air about 137 West 88th Street. Mrs. Loamford, reduced to oscillation between gleeful tears and tearful glee, piloted Dorothy about the city in quest of a trousseau until Dr. Knight ordered her to bed so that she might be in the best possible physical condition for her daughter's wedding evening. Uncle Elliott, apparently leaving men's hats to find heads for themselves, took charge of the nuptials.

"A wedding's just like anything else," he explained, "if you go about it in the right way."

One of Uncle Elliott's suggestions was that no engagement announcements be issued.

"They will be!" contradicted Dorothy. "It's not the thing to be married without being engaged."

"You've been engaged since October," argued Uncle Elliott, "and putting it in writing won't make any difference. What's the use of consuming postage to tell people you're engaged when you're going to tell 'em you're going to be married a week later?"

He put the question to Arnold as man to man.

Arnold caressed Dorothy and said that he was willing to leave all such details to his little girl. Whatever she said was good enough for him.

"No engagement announcements," said Uncle Elliott. "And now I'll get estimates on wedding announcements."

Dorothy felt that he was dragging a commercial note into a romantic atmosphere. He thought of everything in

Here Comes the Bride

terms of business. He could be depended on, but how different he was from Arnold, who was just as good a business man, but who could leave his work in his office. No wonder Uncle Elliott had never married! Think of him on a honeymoon. He would install a time-clock. If Arnold could only manage all of these matters! But Arnold had to put his business in such shape that he could make an extended honeymoon. They hardly had time to go to Europe this year. If Dorothy went to Europe she would study. So many great singers had studied in Europe. But she shrank from an educational honeymoon. They would go to California. It would cost about as much as a trip to Europe and it wouldn't take so much time. Anyhow, the climate was ideal for a honeymoon.

It was terrible—it was so hard to get a trousseau. The shops simply didn't have what you wanted. There was so much to be bought. Why should she be bothered with getting linens? And yet who but the bride should buy the bridal appurtenances? Of course, some of them arrived in the form of presents. She didn't know that she had so many friends and relatives. It was such a bore, though, to acknowledge the gifts. She would make Arnold do it on the way to California. She hoped there would be no engagements to sing. They would be an invasion of her privacy. It would be rather pleasant to turn them down graciously but firmly, or postpone them until it suited her convenience. Her career would go on, of course, after marriage. Was it Freron who had said that no virtuous woman could sing until after her marriage? Or who was it?

It would not be a church wedding. Arnold never went to church and her attendance had been irregular. They would have to take a ballroom in a hotel. Mrs. Loam-

"Our Little Girl"

ford thought that a small wedding at home and a reception would be appropriate, but that was foolish. It wasn't one thing or the other. It would be better to run down to City Hall and to be married by the City Clerk. Arnold agreed that Dorothy ought to have just the kind of wedding she desired and so did Dorothy.

Making out the list of guests was such a bother. If you left out one, another would be insulted, and if you invited another and left out one, there would be more trouble. She decided that only her closest friends and Arnold's would be asked. Arnold had so many friends. He simply had to ask his classmates and his frat brothers and his business friends. She would ask a few officials from the opera and a few famous artists and the girls who meant the most to her. It was easy enough to select the celebrities, but who were the girls who meant the most to her?

Really, she had no very close friends. The demands of an artistic career were too great to permit the exclusive association that produced intimates. Who could be the bridesmaids? And the maid of honor? She couldn't be unattended at a big hotel wedding. Arnold's young sister would make a sweet maid of honor, and there were various cousins who ought to be bridesmaids. Arnold had a married sister, too. She could be matron of honor. Arnold was such a help.

Ought she to invite any of the men who had been attentive to her? For instance, Tommy? It would be almost thrilling to have him sitting there, wishing he were in Arnold's place that very minute. Tommy? He had proposed to her, but he didn't mean anything. Better to invite him, though. He had helped her professionally, and it would be embarrassing if she encountered him after the wedding. They could place him at a distant

Here Comes the Bride

table. The poor boy probably would take it hard, but it was all his own fault. At least, it wasn't Dorothy's, for she never had encouraged him.

Maxwell or Harper? A thousand times no! She was through with them anyhow. She would find another manager when she resumed her singing. She could see Harper at the wedding, slapping some matron, hitherto unknown to him, on the bare back and saying "Pardon my French." It mightn't be diplomatic to omit them, but it might be a delicate way of serving notice that Dorothy would be under another management hereafter.

Dorothy put aside thoughts of managements, concert engagements and related disturbances, but Uncle Elliott called a conference on the subject one evening. The conferees were Dorothy, Arnold and Uncle Elliott, who opened the meeting.

"Let's have a little conference about your singing," he said, by way of introduction. "I want to get this proposition straight. Do you intend to go on after the wedding?"

"I don't know why not," commented Dorothy. "I have some artistic standing and there's no reason why I should stop just when my career is well under way."

Arnold beamed ecstatically.

"That's just the way I feel about it," he assented. "I don't want to hog all your beautiful singing. There's so much of you I'll have all to myself."

He sniggered and pressed Dorothy's hands. Uncle Elliott smiled appreciatively.

"Then we agree that Dorothy is to continue her singing. Now, I've been watching your progress, Dorothy, and it strikes me that we haven't been going about this thing in a big way. You made a good impression at your first recital. You've sung since at just one concert. Now, I

"Our Little Girl"

don't want to butt in where I'm not wanted, but it strikes me what you need is better management. The goods are there, but the sales department isn't producing. When we've got a fine line of hats, we don't sit still and wait for people to come and get 'em. No, sir! We get out and hustle and move those goods! Selling is the life of business, and don't you forget it. I don't know anything about your manager, but he wouldn't last twenty-four hours with me as a salesman. He's just an order taker."

Dorothy yawned.

"That's no news to me," she remarked. "I'd decided long ago to change."

"Yes—but there's no use swapping horses in mid-stream," continued Uncle Elliott. "And you might not get such a good horse, if you know what I mean. Don't throw away your dirty water until you know where to get clean. Isn't that so, Arnold?"

Arnold kissed Dorothy and agreed that it was.

"Now, I didn't call this conference to talk. I mean action. Here's my proposition. What's the use of leaving everything to a manager? Arnold's a good business man, and I'm no slouch on the selling end, if I do say so myself. Now, I've got the plan all drawn up, the details to be settled by me and Arnold. We'll form the Reitz Concert Management, and concentrate on one line—Dorothy Reitz. We'll spend money and make you the biggest thing in the music game. That's cold turkey for you. All you've got to do is to say whether you'll let us sell you."

He pounded his chair resoundingly.

"That's what I call going about it in a business-like way!"

Arnold embraced her, and ran his hand tenderly down her shoulders and arms.

"Isn't that wonderful, darling?"

Here Comes the Bride

He released her and shook hands heartily with Uncle Elliott.

"Count on me to the limit," he announced.

It would not do to rush to an acceptance. Prima donnas must not be too eager. And yet the scheme was excellent. Several world celebrities had managements devoted exclusively to their advancement. It would make her a personality instead of a singer on a manager's list. She wouldn't have to deal with Maxwell or some other manager who probably would do no better for her. The Reitz Concert Management would keep her constantly before the public. Fame was only a step away.

Suddenly she kissed Uncle Elliott.

"It's wonderful!" she cried.

Arnold caught her firmly and kissed her repeatedly.

"It's wonderful!" he exclaimed between kisses.

Uncle Elliott stood up solemnly. He looked at the young couple as though he were a preacher bestowing a blessing on a particularly favored union. He tucked his hand in his coat pocket and drew forth a highly decorated wallet from which he extracted two green slips of paper.

"Here," he said tremulously, "is your wedding present. This"—holding out one slip—"is yours for whatever you need. This"—holding out the other—"founds the Reitz Concert Management."

He sank back into his chair as though he had just recovered from a great emotional ordeal.

Arnold held up the green slips silently and showed them to Dorothy. They were payable to Dorothy Reitz Loamford and called for \$10,000 each.

Dorothy didn't know what to say. She had expected a generous gift from Uncle Elliott, but she had never thought of a large check to be devoted to whatever pleased her in addition to a professional subsidy. For a moment

"Our Little Girl"

she stared at the green slips and ran her fingers aimlessly over them, as though she were feeling a visiting card to ascertain whether it was engraved. This was what her commercial, pompous, moribund uncle had done for her. She was aware of tears. One ought to weep at such moments. Arnold, she noticed, had gripped both of Uncle Elliott's hands and was shaking them with athletic gratitude. She flung her arms about Uncle Elliott's neck, and kissed him. He, too, was weeping.

Arnold still clutched Uncle Elliott's hands. Dorothy had possession of his neck, shoulders, and face. And this model for some marble group was weeping. They wept in unison for several minutes.

It was the happiest moment in Dorothy's life. At last people would have to recognize her. She became oblivious of Arnold, who was too overcome with manly emotion even to hug her, and of Uncle Elliott, who sat like a lachrymose pontiff. She saw Carnegie Hall—no, the Hippodrome—even Madison Square Garden—crowded, with enormous billboards bearing the name and fame of Dorothy Reitz all about the building. The great auditorium was jammed, with standees all about the background and even in the aisles, fire laws or no fire laws. In the lobby was a conspicuous poster: "No seats or standing room left." About the entrance, the mob was fighting to get in, and there were policemen, vainly struggling to maintain order. The platform was a flower garden, and the piano—but there was no piano. An orchestra of a hundred men, led by an international celebrity, was playing an overture. The crowd cared little for the prelude and chatted as though this were the entr'acte music in a theatre. Then silence. Handclapping started in a far corner of the balcony. It swept throughout the house, reaching the stage, where the musicians stood up and

Here Comes the Bride

played a fanfare as Dorothy Reitz—Madame Dorothy Reitz, it was—entered in an indescribably costly gown, bearing an overwhelming bouquet. She stood near the edge of the stage, smiling graciously, waiting for the enthusiasm to spend itself that she might begin her program. The celebrated conductor's frantic taps for silence availed nothing against the popularity of the prima donna. Yet one nod from Madame Reitz to the musicians ended the tumult. The violins and 'cellos surged forth in brilliant melody. Above them rose the voice of Madame Reitz.

"Children, I must be going."

Uncle Elliott had risen, and the concert was over.

Dorothy hardly spoke as Uncle Elliott left the house. She returned Arnold's continued caresses almost perfunctorily. She was still in Madison Square Garden, singing above the violins and the 'cellos.

"Dot, dear——"

She waved Arnold away. Her eyes were closed. The concert was coming to an end. The crowd had mounted the stage, clamoring for additional numbers. The lights of the hall were turned out. The shouting and cheering continued. Dorothy, on Arnold's arm, was fighting her way to her car through a solid block of people, all intent on looking at her, shaking her hand, kneeling before her. Suddenly she was snatched from Arnold's side. She was borne high on the shoulders of the crowd, and carried to her automobile. The car was full of flowers and there was a long streamer about it, announcing the devotion of New York's music lovers to "Our Dorothy." There was no way of progressing through this throng. She stood up, and there was stillness.

"My friends, my dear friends," she was saying, "how I wish from the bottom of my heart that I could shake

"Our Little Girl"

each one of you by the hand and thank you for all you have done! I shall never forget it. It—it—it is too kind!"

She sank back, overcome, and the crowd dispersed respectfully, following the car on foot until the chauffeur had put on speed and distanced the cheering multitudes.

"Dot, dear, is anything the matter?"

The dream was over, but the mood and the memories lingered. She kissed Arnold. Her manager—her husband!

"I was just thinking, Arnold, dear."

"Of what?"

"Of all that will happen after we're married. You'll be my manager—and then——"

"My little prima donna!"

He almost crushed her.

She disentangled herself from his clutch. A prima donna must rest.

"Now you must go home," she said lightly. "Your prima donna is going to rest. Be a good boy."

"But I'm your manager," he objected.

He was clever, the dear boy.

"I know it," she retorted, "but my musical manager only. Just now you're my future husband and you must do what I tell you."

He laughed. His laugh was attractive. It showed a fine set of teeth, and it was hearty.

"All right, my little nightingale."

She stood at the window, watching him as he jumped into the car and drove down to Broadway. He was more than a sweet man. He was wonderful. He was sympathetic.

She felt a lameness in her arm.

"But I mustn't let him squeeze me like that again," she reflected.

Here Comes the Bride

Even a husband shouldn't be too familiar. Singers weren't like other people. They had moods when squeezing was the thing, and at other times they must be treated like nuns. *Prima donna*.

The business of completing the trousseau was a serious one. Mrs. Loamford had been eliminated definitely as a member of the purchasing committee, Dr. Knight having convinced her that rest, rest, and more rest was essential to a woman of her years. Dorothy's professional shopping companion was a Miss Ward, a bright-eyed young woman whose playful slenderness and mischievous bobbed hair belied the shrewd business woman who somehow inhabited this fascinating body. Miss Ward had a miraculous way of extracting from unwilling and ignorant salesfolk the very articles that Dorothy demanded. Trousseau hunting soon developed into a routine which ran in this fashion:

Dorothy would enter a shop to buy a few dozen towels for her prospective bathroom.

"I want two dozen towels," she would say; "you know the sort."

The saleswoman would look puzzled.

"Don't you understand?" Dorothy would ask sharply.

"How can I understand you when you don't tell me?" the saleswoman would answer.

"Very well," Dorothy would conclude, as she thought, in a tone that pulverized the girl. "If you don't know your business, I'm sure we can find a place where people do!"

Here Miss Ward would approach the counter and rattle off a string of numbers, like a quarterback.

"You have 2X—A24, my dear, haven't you?"

Overcome by this fluent technical language, the saleswoman would produce the towels.

"Are you sure these will fit into our bathroom?" Dor-

"Our Little Girl"

othy would inquire, fingering the material suspiciously.

"What kind of bathroom will you have?" Miss Ward would ask, innocently.

"Why—oh, you know the kind of bathroom!" Dorothy would snap haughtily.

"These'll fit exactly," Miss Ward would say. "They're just right. I'm sure your husband will *like* these towels."

And so to the next shop.

To Uncle Elliott had been delegated the duties attendant to the wedding proper. He had hired a large ballroom, employed the most expensive caterer, engaged an exclusive string quartet to play during the ceremony and a promiscuous jazz orchestra to furnish the incentive for post-nuptial dancing. The famous bridal suite also had been reserved for the night and the customary injunction about not letting anyone know where the young couple was going was delivered with proper dignity. Uncle Elliott had gone into conference with a railroad official and emerged with a drawing-room to the coast. His latest advertising man had recently evolved a slogan, "The Reitz Way Is the Right Way," and Uncle Elliott proved that he could do Big Things in the Right Way by obtaining the services of the Rev. Dr. Glennister Mayer, not to be married by whom was, in good society, the social equivalent of living together out of wedlock. Uncle Elliott had gone about it in the go-getter spirit; he had done the big thing; he had got down to bedrock with his brass tacks and hammered them in with knockout punches.

As Dorothy prepared to march down the carpeted aisle to the impromptu altar in the ballroom she felt much as she had felt that afternoon in Aeolian Hall—how many years ago it seemed! The past was all a blank. She knew that Arnold stood at the end of an interminable soft road, surrounded by a gaping audience. With Arnold

Here Comes the Bride

was Mike Jacobson, a frat brother who had been selected as best man. Mike had fortified himself against his arduous trials by frequent sessions with the ushers whose hips were, for the time being, stouter than ever nature designed them. Dorothy knew that she was taking Uncle Elliott's arm. She saw a procession of misty ladies lurching forward ahead of her. The Rev. Dr. Glennister Mayer stood directly in front of her, but many miles away, his head uplifted and his hands folded about a Bible. She heard something that sounded like a wedding march. The first violin sharpened terribly.

The technical deficiencies of the first violin reminded her that she was a prima donna. This was her audience. It was her performance. She must march down the aisle grandly. She swept down the carpeted lane, apparently unaware of the age-old murmurs about the bride looking too sweet for anything. She heard the first violin stop abruptly and heard his fellows cease raggedly in the middle of a measure. She was aware of the Rev. Dr. Glennister Mayer peering over her head and Arnold's, rolling out reverberating syllables in a rich monotone. She started as he lowered his voice and demanded of Arnold whether he would love, honor, cherish and protect this woman. Arnold murmured "I do," and hardly had his voice disappeared when the Rev. Dr. Glennister Mayer inquired confidentially whether she would love, honor, and cherish this man. She looked up a moment, questioningly. Then she set her shoulders and announced that she would, in a clear, almost too clear, tone.

The Rev. Dr. Glennister Mayer again lifted his head as though he had had enough of this personal traffic and boomed forth divers orotundities to the crowd. She felt Arnold's arm. She noticed a ring on her finger—how had it come there? She kissed Arnold, and then the audience

"Our Little Girl"

swarmed about her. She was bowing, smiling, kissing. Everybody, anybody—who were they? A moment later she was at a table. Everybody was eating and yelling. Now and then she would rise with Arnold and sit down again to handclapping and singing. What was going on?

"Come, dear."

Arnold was leading her away. The crowd seemed to be following. She threw them a kiss.

"Your bouquet."

She flung her bridal bouquet over her shoulder and saw an unusually homely girl—probably one of Arnold's cousins—push over several young women in a plunge for the flowers.

"She's next!"

Arnold laughed. They were outside the ballroom. They were alone.

"You were wonderful!"

Then she realized that it wasn't her vision of Madison Square Garden that had come true. She was married to Arnold.

"Come, dear."

He took her arm and led her to an elevator. They entered a large room. At their entrance, a maid bowed obsequiously and disappeared. Arnold took her in his arms and kissed her for a few minutes.

"We're married—dear, we're married!"

He almost throttled her in his ecstasy.

"Too much glare for my lovely one?"

He switched off the brilliant candelabra, leaving the room illuminated only by pink-shaded wall brackets.

There was a knock at the door. Arnold rushed to open it. Mrs. Loamford was there, quite discomposed by tears.

"I must kiss my baby good night."

Here Comes the Bride

She kissed Dorothy tremulously and embraced her long. Then she kissed Arnold.

"Be good to my little baby," she murmured, and ran out of the room, breathing heavily and sobbing.

A moment later she entered again, this time without a preliminary signal.

"Telephone me in the morning that everything's all right," she gulped out. "Good night."

"Everything *will* be all right, won't it?" commented Arnold, placing his arm about Dorothy's waist.

He was very handsome in the half-light. He was more than that; he was beautiful. She threw her arms about him.

"Please, dear," she whispered. "Do we need all this light?"

"You and I?" he murmured.

The pink-shaded lights went out, leaving a little band of moonlight streaming in. She saw the reflection of her shoulders in the mirror. They were lovely. She felt inspired.

"It's all like a dream, isn't it?" she asked in a low tone. Arnold patted her cheeks playfully, longingly.

"It's better," he sighed.

XXI

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Dorothy's correspondence on the honeymoon was confined to one post-card from Hollywood, where a guide piloted her and Arnold about the various show places and held forth on the theme that Hollywood wasn't any worse than any other place in the United States, only you read more about it and why did the papers have to drag the private lives of people into daylight? The card showed a stucco studio, was addressed to Mrs. Loamford, and told anyone who cared to read that the honeymooners were having the time of their lives. Arnold, however, seemed to have developed a latent literary bent. He wrote frequently and glowingly of the wonderful sights, the wonderful wife and allied phenomena.

"Dear Mother Loamford," said one of his letters. "We are having a wonderful time out here. If you have never been here you cannot imagine how wonderful it is. The studios are 'some' sights and it is worth while to come here, especially when you go with a wonderful little girl like Dorothy.

"We are both having the time of our lives and it is doing us a lot of good to be here in the California sunshine. We certainly are enjoying it, and you ought to be here, for California is 'some' place."

One of the dwellers on Wiseacre Square, Hollywood, escorted them to a restaurant one evening and pointed out the grand dames of the cinema.

"They're not so beautiful," commented Dorothy.

In fact, they looked decidedly plain and rather dis-

sipated, she thought. Probably the films were retouched.

"Indeed not," agreed Arnold. "I'd rather have you than all of them put together."

Arnold's compliment revived an idea which had long been inanimate.

"Arnold, dear," said Dorothy, "why can't I go into the movies?"

Arnold took the suggestion without proper enthusiasm.

"It's a terrible life," he ventured.

"It's thrilling!" she countered. "You must get me a chance!"

"Now, dear——"

"Don't try to put this aside!"

One weakness that Arnold had revealed was a habit of trying to divert her when she had ideas. It was all right for most husbands. The average girl was full of foolish notions. But she wasn't just a sweet young thing on a honeymoon. Arnold didn't always appreciate that she was an artist and that she was entitled to the attention and consideration due to an artist. It was one of the things he would have to learn. Otherwise, he was a sweet man.

"I mean it, Arnold," she insisted. "You ought to be able to arrange it. Look at those frights they have in the pictures. If I couldn't look better than them—why—anyhow, I want you to see some of the directors and arrange it."

"Now, listen."

Arnold placed his hand on her knee and spoke paternally.

"I know what you're going to say. You're going to tell me that this life isn't anything for me—aren't you?"

"No, dear."

"Yes, you were! Don't try to deny it."

"Our Little Girl"

She knew her husband. One can't live with a man for a month without knowing him.

"No, really——"

"Oh, don't try to contradict me. I know what you're going to say, and that's all there is to it."

Arnold rubbed the palms of his hands, a motion through which he went whenever he was at a loss for a ready reply.

"See? You don't answer. I knew I was right!"

She amused herself by playing with the spoons in front of her.

"Well, why don't you say something?" she challenged.

Arnold looked at her sharply. She didn't like the look. She had seen it once before, on the night when he quarreled with her after Freron's party.

"All right—I *will* say something!"

His voice was metallic and he chopped off his words abruptly.

It was no use letting him get into this temper. It didn't mean much. He would come crawling back after his outburst and beg forgiveness, but it wasn't nice to see him in this mood.

"What a funny boy you are!"

She laughed sweetly and handed him a glass of water.

"Cool off, Arnold, dear."

Arnold pushed aside the glass resentfully.

"No."

He shook his head and stared at her angrily. This seemed to be more serious than she had supposed. He was stubborn, and usually he was the most tractable man in the world. He looked injured and insulted, and what reason did he have to look injured and insulted? He seemed rather attractive, even so, but if she yielded to him now he would become conceited.

Happily Ever After

"All right."

She rose, and snatched up her cape from the back of her chair.

"Why, Dorothy——"

Arnold had followed.

"Don't speak to me. I don't want to listen to you if you can't speak to me decently. I'm not a child."

She started to leave the restaurant. At a near-by table somebody snickered audibly. Arnold became deep red. He started after her savagely. If he was going to behave like this, she'd teach him a lesson. She walked quickly to the revolving doors at the entrance and told the door-man to get her a taxi. Arnold was at the doors when a waiter stopped him. Dorothy looked back and saw a crowd gathering about Arnold and the waiter. Arnold shoved the waiter aside, only to find himself confronted by the manager. With a sweep of his arm, Arnold pulled several bills out of his pocket and threw them at the manager and almost dived through the doors as Dorothy stepped into her taxi and drove off.

Arnold would follow her, and then there would be a fine scene—the first scene in their married life. But he had started it with his stubbornness and his—his stupidity. Perhaps he had no sense of humor. Once she had considered him clever. But people who are bright in public are dull at home. He ought to come back, apologize and behave. It was all his fault. He didn't understand her.

That was a comforting thought. He didn't understand her. Well, perhaps she wasn't so easy to understand. She was an artist and artists have personalities of their own. But he might at least try to understand her. She understood *him*!

The taxi left her at the hotel, and Dorothy took the key from the room-clerk. Arnold would follow in a moment.

"Our Little Girl"

He would rage all over the place. It would be no use stopping him—even if he could be stopped. The last time that anything like this had happened it was a simple matter to bid him good night and to leave him. But that was before she had married him. That couldn't be done now. Why had she ever been fool enough to marry? She didn't have to marry. She didn't need a man to keep her.

She looked about their room. Arnold had left his clothes lying on the bed, and the bureau was in disorder. He was so slovenly. He dressed well, but look at the way he left things when he went out. She pitched his clothes to the floor in disgust.

Well, he would be back in a minute. Then the storm would break. She looked at herself in the mirror. She had interesting eyes, she thought. Her hair looked well. But Arnold——

Was there any reason why she should face him when he was capricious and unreasonable? Certainly not! She would show him his place, once and for all time. She locked the door and fastened the little bolt above the lock. Let him try to come in now! Let him spend the night somewhere else! He would think differently in the morning! She turned out the light, undressed, and lay in bed. Perhaps he wouldn't come back tonight. What then? Where would he go? Would he attempt revenge by seeking out one of the numerous lady loves of whom Hollywood was reputed to be full? If he did that, there would be only one result—she would divorce him instantly and be glad that she had found him out as quickly as she had. There was that little blonde girl at Freron's, with her bare back and her disgustingly short skirts—but he really couldn't have had anything to do with a creature like that! Still he was an ardent sort—in his moments of passion——

Happily Ever After

The knob of the door turned. Dorothy looked about quickly. Then a knock. She would not answer.

"Dorothy!"

She heard Arnold's voice snarling from the hall. If he was still in this mood, she wouldn't answer. He could sleep in the hall, for all she cared.

"Dorothy! Open the door at once!"

For what? Did he think he had only to command and she would obey? If he spoke to her properly, she would let him in. And then she would tell him what she thought of him!

"Dorothy! Must I force my way in?"

Force his way in! She'd like to see him do it! Did he think that threats would help him? He didn't understand her at all!

The rattling at the door ceased. She listened carefully. What would he do now? He couldn't invoke assistance without informing everyone that he had had a falling out with his wife. The clerks had guessed that they were a honeymoon couple. They wouldn't have, if Arnold hadn't given it away by his absurd affection in front of everybody. There were whispers in the hall. Then footsteps, fading away far down the corridor. Then silence. She heard nothing but the clatter and whirring of automobiles from the street. Somebody lurched down the hall, whistling. Arnold? The lurcher passed by and his whistling died out in the distance.

She lay awake, waiting for another rattle at the door. A boy passing outside with a pitcher of water in which the ice clicked noisily startled her. There was silence for a long time. He was not coming back. Probably he was sleeping somewhere else. Or perhaps he had gone out. Maybe he was standing in the street outside, summoning up courage to return. She tiptoed to the window and

"Our Little Girl"

looked down. There were many men there, smoking and staring at passers-by. She looked for Arnold's familiar hatband. Gay colors there were a-plenty, but no sign of Arnold's distinctive combination. What had he done? She sat by the window, wondering.

Was this some game of his? Was he trying to worry her into submission? She would show him that she was not the woman to be frightened to his will by an exhibition of this sort! She would sleep, Arnold or no Arnold. *Prima donna*.

What if he stayed away? Would he desert her? Where had she read of a husband who sued for divorce on the ground that his wife locked him out of the bedroom? Oh, well, that man was a movie actor. One might expect anything of a movie actor. They were a stupid lot in the movies. She was tired of Hollywood, tired of California, tired of rushing about, tired, tired, tired. She was tired. And she went to sleep.

She dreamed of Arnold going into the movies as a director. He was putting on a big mob scene in Madison Square Garden, which seemed to have been reconstructed in Hollywood, with a restaurant where the concert platform might otherwise have been. He couldn't make himself heard through the megaphone and every time he shouted to the crowd there would be applause instead of the activity which he had commanded. There was a piano at Arnold's side, and there was Goldstein, strumming modulatory chords. And then the megaphone was snatched from Arnold, and a familiar voice introduced Madame Dorothy Reitz to the mob, which became an audience. The voice was that of Tommy Borge, who shoved Dorothy to the edge of a platform and held up his hands for silence. Goldstein started to play something which she had never heard and a jazz drummer seemed to

be assisting him. She looked to Arnold for aid. She called him. He came climbing over the edge of the platform and as he pulled himself up, Tommy threw the megaphone at him. As it struck Arnold, the jazz drummer liberated a terrific crash on his instrument——

She woke up with a little scream and heard a pounding at the door. Arnold was outside, calling out her name. She looked about sleepily, blinking at the sunlight. The pounding continued, and the calling. Had something happened? Where was she? She rushed to the door and unlocked it. Arnold almost tumbled into her arms.

"Oh, thank God! Thank God!" he cried.

She began to collect herself. Arnold was fully dressed, but his clothing looked shabby, as though he had been sleeping in it. He wasn't shaved, and his hair, usually plastered carefully, was tousled. His eyes were heavy and almost red. His face was drawn and dull. So this was what she had done to him!

"Thank God! Thank God!"

He repeated this formula endlessly, kissing her despite her efforts to avoid contact with the stubby bristles on his face. He seemed maudlin and clutched her feverishly, running his hands over her as though to make certain that all of her were still intact.

"I was afraid that something had happened!" he sobbed. "Will you ever forgive, Dot? Can you ever forgive me? I was such a brute last night! I didn't mean it! I swear I didn't mean it! Say you forgive me!"

A fine figure of a man! This was the calm, self-confident, sweet, but masculine, Arnold! An unkempt wreck, swaying before her, crying out prayers in a broken voice! If she had seen him in this condition a year ago——

Disgustedly she put her arms about him and placed him in a chair. He blinked at her wearily. Had he been

"Our Little Girl"

drinking? She knew that one man out of every five was a bootlegger or a bootlegger's agent, but Arnold didn't care much for liquor. Had he become enraged and gone on a spree or had he been frightened and paced the floor all night without going to bed? One could hardly tell which guess was correct by looking at the trembling figure huddled in the chair. Dorothy inspected him cautiously and decided that Arnold had not been drinking. He was on the point of dozing, when he shook himself and stared at his wife.

"Why did you lock me out?" he demanded crossly but feebly.

Would he renew the struggle? He hadn't much strength. She could vanquish him easily in his present condition. In fact, she had vanquished him. It would be trivial to crush him altogether now. She would be magnanimous and soothe his tortured nerves.

"Now," she cooed, "you know perfectly well why I kept you away."

She wouldn't say "locked you out"; it had a vulgar ring to it.

"You're tired," she added. "Go to sleep. You'll feel better after a little rest."

"I've been worrying all night," he grumbled. "I thought maybe you weren't well or something and I——"

Was he bidding for sympathy? He was so exhausted that he didn't know what he was doing. Such a child!

"Now, Arnold," she chided, "go straight to bed. Sleep. It'll do you good. You need it."

She supported him as he staggered to bed. He fell on the crumpled sheets without making any effort to take off his clothes or to compose himself. He turned his head wearily. He spoke thickly, as though the process were an effort which strained his powers.

Happily Ever After

"Why," he whispered querulously, "why in hell did you lock me out? Why did you do it for? My God, didn't you know——"

Whatever it was that Dorothy did or didn't know never was revealed, for Arnold suddenly turned over on his side and fell asleep, murmuring drowsily until his unintelligible complaints gave way to irregular snores.

What a child he really was! He had misbehaved and she had been compelled to punish him. He had started the quarrel—over what? She hardly could recall just what it was that prompted her to leave him in the restaurant. Some foolish little thing, something about movies—idiot! Well, he wouldn't try it again.

She dressed quietly, glancing with pity at the weary body that snored and tossed about the bed. He was nice, after all. He might have gone off on a tear. Instead, he had walked the halls or sat in the lobby all night, worrying about her and waiting for the opportunity to atone for his misdeeds. She would order something for him to eat.

Dorothy left strict orders that no one was to enter the Deering suite without notifying her. Mr. Deering was indisposed this morning. Perhaps a soft-boiled egg could be sent up at noon. Any mail? The clerk grinned in a way that persuaded her to leave this hotel as soon as Arnold was in shape to travel, and handed her two letters.

"I simply felt I must speak to you!"

A woman's voice gushed up beside her. She saw a small, homely, middle-aged woman, with a little black leather-bound book in her hand.

"You are Miss Dorothy Reitz, aren't you?" continued the woman. "I'm sure you are. I heard your concert in New York last fall and I enjoyed it so much!"

Prima donna. Even here, where she had never sung, her reputation had preceded her. It was high time that

“Our Little Girl”

she resumed her work. There were still publics to conquer.

“Thank you so much!” Dorothy responded cordially. “I am so glad that you enjoyed it!”

The little woman almost melted in the gracious warmth which Dorothy poured down on her. She fumbled with her little book and opened it to a blank page.

“May I ask for your autograph?” she inquired shyly. “Many great people have done me the honor of writing their names in my little book. See—I have Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks and dear Mr. Chaplin and all of the Talmadges and Mr. Hart—he was *so* nice about it—and——”

She became breathless.

“And it would be so nice if you would write your name and perhaps a little line or a little verse here, too,” she concluded with respiration returned to normal.

A simple fool—and yet audiences were made up of simple fools. Dorothy took the black book and asked the grinning clerk for a pen.

“If you please,” suggested the owner of the book, “make it a personal inscription. My name is Dixie Lee.”

Dorothy wondered where the idiot had acquired so pretentious and unsingable a name. However, although Dixie Lee might be a simpleton, she was one who carried her fame into far places. Dorothy looked thoughtfully at the blank page. There was only one thing that a prima donna could write, except for a celebrity.

“To Miss Dixie Lee—Sincerely—Dorothy Reitz.”

The writing was pretty. It certainly was a more effective script than that of the movie luminaries who had written on other pages.

“Oh, Miss Reitz! You don’t know how grateful I am! I certainly shall go to hear you sing the *very* next time you appear! Oh, thank you so much!”

Miss Lee pattered off. She might not have been an unusually attractive specimen, but she reflected a certain enthusiasm on the part of Dorothy's public. It was comforting and it suggested that it might be correct to make public appearances. Honeymoons shouldn't be permitted to interfere with art. She had her own life to live.

Dorothy examined the letters in her hand. An announcement from a music publisher went skimming into an adjacent basket. The other was from Uncle Elliott, who had used his latest stationery. This was "Reitz Week," the motto of which was "Give Your Head Its Reitz." Uncle Elliott had dictated this letter—a line in red ink across the top of the sheet announced that the missive was "a personally dictated letter from Elliott Reitz"—and the usual salutations were missing. A line in red ink at the bottom of the sheet confided that "we omit the usual meaningless salutations in the interest of Better Letters." Yet Uncle Elliott had slipped up, for he had written "My dear Niece and Nephew" in his own broad, jerky penmanship above the beginning of the typing. There was an enclosure, which Dorothy examined before reading the letter. It was a lease on Carnegie Hall, New York, for early in the following autumn—one of the most desirable concert dates on the whole calendar.

"The Reitz Concert Management," ran the letter, "is now formed and incorporated, and plans are being laid to make next season a busy and profitable one. We have engaged a musical consultant and a traveling agent, and we confidently expect to show big returns when the season is under way. Already we have put business on the books.

"We enclose a lease on Carnegie Hall for a concert early in the coming season. Kindly acknowledge receipt of same."

"Our Little Girl"

Uncle Elliott had violated again the epistolary *mores* of his firm by writing "Best wishes" near the bottom of the sheet.

Queer how everything came together! Just after an admirer had asked Dorothy for an autograph, came this letter, conveying tidings of a brilliant season. There was no use in staying about Hollywood any longer. She would go back to New York, study a little, sing a little, and help in the important business of putting her name before the public. Uncle Elliott had written nothing about hiring a publicity agent, but he was a good old man. She must tell Arnold!

Arnold probably was still asleep. If he only knew how close his wife stood to fame, he never would repeat his ridiculous exhibition of last night. She felt like waking him up and thrusting Uncle Elliott's letter under his nose. But it might be just as well to let him sleep. The poor boy was so tired!

Dorothy whiled away an hour composing a letter to Uncle Elliott, a panegyric which extolled the president of the Reitz hat establishment as one of America's genuine patrons of the fine arts. After affixing her prepossessing signature to this eulogy, she tore the letter into a shower of tiny white flakes and let it drift amiably to the floor. One could be too enthusiastic. One shouldn't be.

She bought a copy of the *Musical Cosmos* and glanced through the pictures. Who were these singers who were shown fondling dogs, fondling automobiles, fondling tennis rackets, fondling pianos, fondling one another? She was just as important as these adipose and insignificant sopranos who somehow contrived to get themselves into print as "the brilliant young singer." The mirror in the lobby proved to her that she would be more decorative to the *Cosmos* than these gelatinous females, of whom no

one ever had heard, anyhow. It wouldn't be a bad idea to dig out that snapshot that Arnold had taken of her in a bathing suit. Imagine one of these "brilliant young singers" in a bathing suit! These oleaginous women would force the tide up. Dorothy enjoyed the joke.

She wrote a note to the editor of the *Cosmos* informing him that the enclosed picture was his to use if he cared to do so and would he do so at an early date? She considered the advisability of telling him about the Reitz Concert Management, but she thought that this intelligence could come more officially from Uncle Elliott's office. However, Dorothy announced that she would soon have some news to tell the *Cosmos* "which will certainly be a surprise to a good many people."

She went upstairs for the picture and entered her room. Arnold was sitting in his underwear on the edge of the bed, looking refreshed.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Early. Feeling well again?"

"Fine!"

The old Arnold seemed to be coming back.

He rose and stretched.

"I was an awful fool last night, Dot," he said cheerfully. "Can you ever forgive me?"

She kissed him. He had shaved. It was a good omen.

"Look at this—from Uncle Elliott."

She passed him the letter. He read it slowly, nodding thoughtfully. He laid it on the bed and embraced Dorothy.

"Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful," he repeated, kissing her. "That's great!"

"Do you know, Arnold," she remarked, watching carefully to see how he would take the suggestion, "I think we ought to leave here and go back East. I must get ready for my concerts."

"Our Little Girl"

"So soon?"

It was only the ghost of an objection. With penitence still in his voice, he would offer little resistance.

"Immediately."

It was perfect. Cool, determined, friendly, charming and final.

Arnold picked up a shirt.

"All right, dear."

He examined the shirt.

"I'm so glad you've given up the idea of going into the movies," he added casually.

"Who said I had any idea of going into the movies?" she demanded.

"Why, last night——"

"You're such a silly boy sometimes. Put on your clothes and take me out for lunch."

XXII

SYMPHONIA DOMESTICA

At the end of the journey back from Hollywood lay the Deering suite in the Bandusia, a new apartment house on Central Park West in the early Nineties. The Bandusia was the most expensive dwelling in the district and contained no ordinary apartments. There were suites for the married and chambers for bachelors and studios for artists and musicians. Dorothy had favored a studio until she noticed that it gave one practically no room at all, as it consisted of only five rooms, of which two were the merest apologies, and there was no privacy.

The Deering suite, therefore, was a nine-room affair which boasted a music-room (or a drawing-room or a living-room or a parlor, depending on who you were) and three master's bedrooms. A master's bedroom was included only in the highest-price suites in the Bandusia, other suites of similar size and architecture having only bedrooms. The Deering suite was done in Gothic, under the supervision of the efficient and charming Miss Ward, who was fast acquiring a reputation for her designs for the recently united. She published a pamphlet of photographs, demonstrating her taste and skill, and acquired a life customer by reproducing "the foyer to the charming and artistic suite of Mme. Dorothy Reitz, the famous prima donna."

Dorothy and Arnold once had discussed the idea of living simply, of having no servants, of doing all of their own work, of being two little birds in a pretty cage, of making their own home in a little paradise of their own, "just you and I." The end of the discussion was the suite

"Our Little Girl"

in the Bandusia. Mrs. Loamford had decided to abandon 137 West 88th Street and to inspect Europe. She had deserved a trip to Europe, she explained, what with bringing up Dorothy to be such a fine woman. The venerable Lena was shifted to the Deering apartments, and Zuleika, a handsome young negress, entered the ménage as mistress of the kitchen. Arnold had had visions of a butler, but Dorothy ruled the hypothetical attendant out on the ground that he would hamper her freedom of motion. On special occasions it might be worth while to have a man in livery for the nonce, but a man constantly around the house would be a nuisance; and singers were so likely to incur gossip that a butler would be a positive menace.

One thing was certain: Dorothy must practise and coach for the Carnegie Hall recital. The first recital had been mismanaged terribly. She had been permitted to go on, an unknown, without any assistance from the manager. She had been merely one of the attractions of the afternoon. This would not happen again. The Reitz Concert Management could not close all competing halls on the occasion of Dorothy's recital, but it could write cogent letters to critics and it could advertise in a manner new to New York and new to the music game. Dorothy would also have an accompanist of international fame—or better, a virtuoso hitherto known only as a solo artist. That would establish her standing!

The seriousness of Dorothy's resolve became apparent a few days after the Deerings had settled themselves in their new suite. Arnold was in one of his buoyant moods. He jumped up from the dinner table whenever Lena left the room and kissed Dorothy with agility and power. He patted her lightly but firmly on her low-cut back and pushed back her chin playfully, following up this attack with a jab of a kiss on the lips.

Symphonia Domestica

"Let me eat, Arnold," she demanded, although his jovial amorousness was rather entertaining.

"I could eat *you* tonight," he retaliated, emphasizing his assertion with a kiss that positively bounded from her mouth.

"Don't be silly," she giggled.

"I'm not silly!"

He looked earnest as he clasped his hands over the puffs of hair at her ears. He drew her head toward him and kissed her aggressively until the creak of the swinging door from the pantry announced the impending entrance of Lena.

"That's enough, Arnold."

She didn't mind his manifestations of ardor, but they were disconcerting at meal time. She rather objected to Arnold's habit of using her lips as a napkin.

"It can't be enough," he protested. "You look so wonderful tonight, it's all I can do——"

He glowed as he held back certain abandoned extravagances of fancy.

"Listen, darling," he continued. "I must take you out tonight. It would be a crime to keep anything so beautiful all to myself."

"For the last time."

He might as well know now that she wouldn't be at his disposal whenever he felt a whim to exhibit a pretty woman. She had her own life to live, her own career to make, her own problems to solve, her own sentences to balance. There was a Carnegie Hall recital ahead of her, a recital that meant the making of her future as a prima donna. Arnold was good company, but good company might not be the best possible guide to a place in the Cecilian sun. She wondered, as she saw him chipping off a piece of roast lamb, whether she hadn't already out-

"Our Little Girl"

grown him. He took such a youthful delight in exercising the obvious prerogatives of a husband. He petted her and played with her as though she were a kitten. As though she had not shown him that night in Hollywood exactly how determined and independent she could be—and would be—when it came to a test of strength.

"How?"

Arnold looked at her curiously, as though it had taken a few minutes for her decision to register with him.

"What I mean is this, Arnold. So far I've been pretty successful. I have some reputation. Musical people know who I am. 'Dorothy Reitz' means more to them than Jenny Jones or Mamie Brown. And it's going to mean as much as any name there is!"

"Certainly it is!"

Arnold seconded her remarks with fervor. She smiled at him. He was a sweet man, but he didn't really understand her.

"I know, Arnold, dear, but it can't be done by going about to this place or that. If that's your idea, please put it out of your head as quickly as you can."

He dropped his knife, dejectedly.

"Why, dear," he complained, "you don't know how I've waited for the time when I could be with you every night and take you out to places. Do you think I could go through all the work I do downtown every day if it weren't that I knew I was coming home to you, if it weren't that I knew I'd take you out——"

"That's silly, and you know it. You're just getting sentimental——"

Arnold tapped his plate with a fork. It was a foolish gesture and Dorothy laughed.

"What are you laughing at?" he demanded suddenly. "I swear I don't like this. I can't see the joke——"

Symphonia Domestica

"Of course you can't. Wait till Lena goes and I'll try to make you see it."

Lena entered and completed her ministrations to the tableware.

"Now what is this?" Arnold asked. "I can take a joke as well as the next fellow, but——"

His face became darker. Dorothy thought that a slow, sullen blush was coming over him. His dark eyes began to dilate and he bit his lips nervously.

"What's wrong, Dot?" he muttered, apparently unable to control his voice. "You're acting queer—I don't like it."

His voice became increasingly menacing. If his face hadn't been so tragic she would have laughed at the exaggerated heaviness of his inflection.

"I want you to take me seriously, Dot. I don't mind a joke——"

She was growing weary of his insistence on his ability to enjoy a joke.

"Who said there was any joke?" she asked lightly.

He sat back suddenly, gaping.

"Then it's true," he gasped, "about not going out?"

Why the melodrama? What absurd notion could be back of his head now? The clever, laughing Arnold, the fine-grained, sympathetic Arnold was proving to be more and more of an unintelligent baby.

She got up and walked around the table, back of his chair. She patted his head, sat on the arm of his chair, and put her arms about his neck. The sourness disappeared from his face, and he smiled at her, a little dumbly, she thought, but trustingly. He was something like a dog. She remembered one of Tommy's comments. She had said that Arnold had fine eyes and Tommy had answered that so had a dog and a dog's were larger. Odd that this

"Our Little Girl"

chance observation of Tommy's should come back after all this time!

Yes, Arnold was like a dog. Throw him a caress, and he would stand on his hind legs for you, pray for you, make a fool of himself for you. Withhold visible signs of affection and he would whimper, whine and growl. But Arnold was a nice dog and a sweet man.

"You aren't going to shut yourself up?" Arnold asked pathetically.

"You're so curious!" she said, patting him gently. "I merely said that I wouldn't go dancing every night. My dear boy, I have a career to attend to. Singing isn't like going to an office every day. You have all the money you need and more comes in without any great trouble. Singing isn't like that. If you don't practise, if you don't work, if you don't study, everybody knows it. I can't be bothered with nonsense when I have a big Carnegie Hall recital staring me in the face."

"Don't be foolish, dear," Arnold counseled.

He seemed to have recovered his composure.

"Why, that recital isn't till next fall. We can have no end of good times until then."

"You don't understand, Arnold. You can't prepare for a thing like a Carnegie Hall recital overnight. It takes weeks and months of hard work."

"So serious?"

He laughed.

"I *am* serious about my singing, and if you don't want to take it seriously you don't have to. You never take anything seriously, anyhow!"

It was effective. Arnold took her hands and protested vehemently and eloquently that earth held nothing for him comparable with Dorothy's success on the concert stage. He would be at her side all the time. He would

Symphonia Domestica

help her on. He would do everything that she desired and if his inclinations interfered with her progress he would forget them. He would be so proud of her——

She shut off his rhapsody abruptly.

"That's like you!" she interjected. "You'll be proud of me when I succeed, when I'm famous, when I'm this and when I'm that! That's easy! Of course you'll be proud of me then! Why shouldn't you be?"

She left the arm of the chair and started to leave the room. He followed her quickly.

"You don't understand me," he said. "I didn't mean that I wasn't proud of you."

"Oh, you don't know *what* you mean!"

She left him, pacing up and down the dining-room. He didn't mean any harm, but it was imperative to put him in his place. Here was a big concert corporation founded only to make her successful. It was hers. It could carry her farther than any ordinary manager. Why should Arnold stand on the other side and suggest silly entertainments? Why should he be permitted to use her to exploit his vanity? He thought that he had married a pretty little thing, a cute little thing, did he? If he hadn't discovered his mistake now, he'd come up against it in short order. That episode in Hollywood should have shown him that his wife was something that he ought to respect—a personality. In fact, Dorothy thought, that was something more than Arnold was! He was good-looking, clever in a mild way and pleasant when he wasn't childish, but he wasn't a personality. "Dorothy Reitz" stood for something definite. "Arnold Deering" was just a man.

But as her militancy wore off, she found him more attractive. He brought business associates to dinner now and then. Dorothy didn't like them particularly, although it was hard to say wherein they failed to win her approval.

"Our Little Girl"

They seemed very much alike. They were all fairly sightly, quick to speak, straightforward, well-bred and agreeable. They lacked the something that distinguished Arnold from them—it may have been the little stretch of personal history that linked Dorothy to Arnold. Few of them ever had heard of Dorothy professionally. She almost ordered Montgomery Burke out of the house because, on being informed by Arnold that Dorothy was a musician, he asked whether she played the piano. Arnold's friends were not an artistic lot. Arnold easily out-distanced them in the appreciation of aesthetic matters, although he was scarcely what Dorothy would consider cultured. He had learned the titles of some of her songs and he took an interest in some of the novelties which Goldstein, who accompanied Dorothy at some of her practice sessions, had unearthed. Arnold would disgust Dorothy hugely by asking her to sing "Kiss Me Again," and following up her acquiescence with a literal compliance with the suggestions laid down in that lyric. However, he listened attentively while she read to him the English versions of old French songs and sang them for him in the original. Arnold had won honors in elementary French in his freshman year at college, but he didn't know anything about the language.

Goldstein became her regular coach. Arnold didn't like the young pianist, although he could find no specific objections to urge against him. Dorothy found Goldstein curt, but he knew his business and he was playing for some of the biggest people in the concert business. Moreover, he could tell her in advance what other artists would offer on their programs in the coming season, and his skill as a discoverer of abstruse ditties was celebrated. She thought of returning to Soedlich. She rather looked forward to a tilt with the eminent lecturer and lover.

It would be easy to set him down sharply now. She could make a fool of him with little effort.

Make a fool of Soedlich! Hadn't she made a fool of herself at that session of—how long ago was it? How young she had acted? Soedlich must have laughed at her for weeks! No, she couldn't go to him. He would regard her as a foolish little girl. She would have to rely on Goldstein. He was faithful, intelligent and patient, but he was far from stimulating. His thin, dark, almost ascetic face might have been poetic had there not been a cynical twitch to his mouth and a critical look in his eyes. A man like Goldstein could not fire one to sing! Soedlich, with his flabby face, his enormous lips and his black, disarrayed hair, contrasted unfavorably with the thin Goldstein, but back of that bulk there was something like a flair. He had—guts. Uncle Elliott would have described Soedlich that way. But guts or no guts—and she never used the word—she couldn't coach with Soedlich. Goldstein could help her over the bad places—and was she still a schoolgirl that she could not make her own interpretations and find her own methods?

The task of spreading the name and fame of Dorothy Reitz—it was Mme. Dorothy Reitz now—was delegated to Harvey Singleton, advertising manager for the Reitz hats. Singleton had been a city editor at the time of the Spanish-American War and had worked for every newspaper in the country, according to his confessions. Uncle Elliott had met Singleton during the latter's brief reign over a New York city desk. The Reitz hats had been maligned in a humorous article. Uncle Elliott hastened to Singleton's office to compel the discharge of all who had been implicated in the offence. He returned with Singleton's promise to become advertising manager for Reitz headwear.

Singleton's code of life was simple. It consisted of

"Our Little Girl"

one word: Space. He bought space, he borrowed space, he made space, he captured space, and whatever transactions in space were possible were commonplaces for Harvey Singleton. When Mme. Dorothy Reitz was presented to him as a new subject for his activities with the medium known as space he smiled concretely, nodded his old gray head understandingly, and, as Tommy Borge once had said of a press-agent, he spaced up and down the room.

Singleton pleased Dorothy more than any man whom she had met professionally. He really had her interest at heart. He worked for her. He realized her importance. He advertised her in the news section. He kept her name and her picture constantly before the public. The concert was several months away, but Singleton believed in creating a demand that would fight for the supply when it came to the market.

The effects of Singleton's efforts were not slow in manifesting themselves. Wherever Dorothy went, she met a reader of Singleton's copy. Arnold had only to introduce her, when some one would say, "Pardon me, but you look like Madame Reitz, the singer." If there was any greater delight than that of answering, "And I *am* Madame Reitz, although to my friends I am Mrs. Deering," Dorothy had yet to experience it. Singleton's master-stroke consisted of a placard which he placed in all of the subways, elevated roads and surface cars. Only the most famous artists were advertised there. A lovely picture of Dorothy smiled at the travelers and a stirring legend invoked their patronage of her singing.

MME. DOROTHY REITZ

Soprano

An American Singer for American Music Lovers

Have You Heard Dorothy Reitz?

Symphonia Domestica

At last Dorothy was really recognized. Arnold was fading into the background. He was a convenient sort of husband. He was helpful, responsive and not too intrusive. She read the papers daily, almost waiting for some reference to Arnold as "Mr. Deering," husband of Mme. Dorothy Reitz." It was a disappointing issue of the *Musical Cosmos* which did not carry an advertisement and an interview concerning Mme. Dorothy Reitz. She wondered where Singleton obtained some of the learning which he credited to her in ready-made interviews, but what did it matter? Her name was getting before the public with a vengeance! When a daily illustrated paper printed her picture attending the tennis matches—"No wonder William T. Tilden played hard to win with Mme. Dorothy Reitz, famous soprano, watching him"—she knew that she was one of the elect.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she asked Arnold, one evening, as he sat in an easy chair, studying market reports.

"What?"

Arnold was brief nowadays, she thought. He was still the handsome youth she had married, but he looked older. Just as well. It became him. A prima donna couldn't have a boy for a husband.

"All this."

She held up a newspaper from New Albany, Indiana, showing her at the tennis matches.

"It ought to be wonderful," Arnold responded a little sourly, "it costs enough."

This was crass of him.

"That's the first time," she said, "that I ever heard you complain of anything like that."

"I'm not complaining," he retorted. "I'm just saying that you pay for all that."

Such a stupid remark.

"Our Little Girl"

"I'm sure," she hinted coyly, "that I'd be very proud if I were a man and my little wife got her picture in papers all over the country."

"Is that so?"

Arnold was waxing sardonic. He held up a New York evening paper and thrust a photograph of a prima donna and her recently acquired baby at Dorothy.

"That's New York," he observed, "not New Albany, Indiana."

He picked up another paper and another.

"In several New York papers," he added.

It was brutal of him. It was a direct slap at her national publicity and she thought that there might be an indirect reference to her lack of interest in children. Children were for contraltos, and she was a soprano. However, it wouldn't be of any avail to explain that to Arnold. But why should this child-bearing prima donna have so much space? She was an older singer, but no more important.

"Instead of making fun of me," she observed, "or trying to—you're not in the least funny, Arnold—you ought to help me. Why don't you do something worth while instead of making silly remarks?"

Arnold crossed over to her and patted her.

"Don't do that!"

She pushed him away.

"Whenever you're rude, you think you can make it up by mauling me about. I won't stand it! Who do you think I am, anyhow?"

He laughed.

"Don't laugh like an idiot! If you can't take me seriously be quiet."

He didn't stop.

"You have no sense of humor," he said.

"I certainly have!"

She was aroused by his charge. Certain things she might not have, but a sense of humor was not one of them!

"Just because I don't giggle like a silly girl at every one of your stupid jokes, you say I have no sense of humor. If you had any sense of humor you wouldn't make such jokes!"

She turned away and waved him back to his chair.

He stood his ground resolutely.

"This is going too far," he declared. "You know, Dot, I've stood an awful lot from you. We've been drifting apart, and it's all your fault."

She would avoid a discussion.

"You're not feeling well tonight," she observed. "Don't you think you'd better go to bed?"

"A lot you care whether I go to bed or not!" he sneered.

Then he recovered himself.

"Listen, Dot," he pleaded, "you know I love you. I've loved you ever since I met you. There never was anybody else."

"No little blondes?"

It was a sharp question, she thought.

"I never loved anybody else," he insisted. "You're the only woman I've ever really cared for. When you said you'd marry me you made me the happiest man in the world. And now——"

He paused dramatically.

"And now, what?"

Dorothy saw no purpose in his pause. If it were to be a game of effects, she could outdo Arnold easily. He was an amateur, and she was a professional. Arnold looked at her awkwardly. Some one had given him the wrong cue, and he didn't know the lines.

"Our Little Girl"

"Listen, Dot——"

"How many more times are you going to say 'Listen, Dot'? I'm listening, God help me!"

He was more aggrieved than before.

"Lis—seriously, Dot, I've wanted to speak to you about this for a long time. We aren't what we used to be. We used to be good pals. Now, we're"—he resisted the impulse to insert another dramatic pause—"just living together in the same house, but we're not—we're not what we ought to be. I love you, Dot. God only knows how much I love you, but I don't know if you love me. Sometimes you act as if I didn't exist at all."

It was a silly speech. He sounded like the leading man in a problem play—and they had been married only a few months. How many was it? June, July, August, September—and Arnold spoke as though it had been forty years!

"You're tired," she remarked.

She had had enough of this. It was annoying and it wasn't interesting. He might really take an interest in her career instead of spouting out elegies on love. He didn't understand her. Why had she married a man who didn't in the least know the way of an artist? She wouldn't have had to marry him. There were others, many others. They passed in review before her. Even Tommy. Yes, Tommy might have understood. Only—think of being married to Tommy! She stared at the pattern in the rug ahead of her. What children men were! How they cried when their toys failed to function according to their whims!

"You're not listening to me."

Arnold stated the obvious fact morosely and left the room.

Dorothy continued her examination of the rug. And

then there was Soedlich, whom she had suspected of having designs on her. At least, he might have been more amusing than Arnold, and he would have understood her. She realized why so many husbands said harsh things about Soedlich. It was only because he understood their wives better than they did. An unattractive old beast, though—but these superficially attractive men weren't anything. Soedlich might be just as charming when you got to know him——

She stretched wearily, and put out the light. What were men, anyhow? She had her own life to live. There was the Carnegie Hall recital. There would be a tour after that, and possibly a European début. Paris or London or possibly Italy, although one ought to make an operatic début in Italy. It might not be a bad idea to learn "Madama Butterfly" or "Mimi." The horses that sang "Butterfly" nowadays!

Arnold seemed just as glum at breakfast the next morning. Dorothy tossed him a batch of cuttings from a press clipping bureau. He glanced at them silently and tossed them back to her! Perhaps she had been a little unfair to him. He was sensitive. He ought to leave the house with a smile.

In her mail was a letter bearing the stationery of the Underwood Concert Corporation.

"Look, Arnold," she cried, holding it up, "I guess they'd like to have me back. Listen."

She tore it open with a fruit knife. A circular, a note and two tickets dropped out. The circular announced the début of Rose Manning, soprano.

"Look what they've got now," laughed Dorothy. "That little flapper was in my class at the conservatory. She used to be a piping coloratura. I suppose they're letting her make herself ridiculous in public."

"Our Little Girl"

She looked at the note. It was in Tommy's hand.

"Dear Dot," Tommy had written. "Miss Manning was in your class, I believe, and it might interest you to hear her recital at the beginning of next month. Maybe Arnold would care to go, too. I think it'll be interesting."

"Tommy Borge," commented Dorothy, "wants us to hear this child."

This would be a great way of making up with Arnold and of drawing him into her work.

"She's singing a week after I do," she said. "If you don't think that I can give a good recital, come along and here *this!*"

"But I *do* think you can," Arnold protested.

She kissed him.

"That's a nice boy," she laughed. "You're not so bad by daylight."

He left her with a broad grin. She marveled at the ease with which she could manage him. She wouldn't drag him to Rose Manning's recital unless he wanted to go. It would be a terrible thing. The program was absurd. It started with a group of negro spirituals. Rose once studied coloratura singing and now this absurd creature started with spirituals. If only she were singing before Dorothy, so that the critics could compare a real artist with a cute flapper who began her programs with spirituals!

As she looked through the newspaper, she saw again the handiwork of Harvey Singleton.

It was fine to be a recognized artist.

It was an attractive picture of Dorothy Reitz standing by the bust of Beethoven in the Central Park "Mall." The heading was "Fair Singer Worships at Master's Local Shrine."

XXIII

CLIMAX

Uncle Elliott stood outside Carnegie Hall on the morning of Dorothy's recital, admiring the great lithographs of Mme. Dorothy Reitz, Soprano, "Have you heard Mme. Dorothy Reitz?" and watching the line at the box office. It was a fluctuating procession of customers. Now it seemed as though all New York were intent on patronizing the attractions scheduled for the forthcoming weeks, and then the long lobby was bare and the snapping of a rubber band across a stack of tickets in the cage reverberated exaggeratedly across the tiled floor. At such moments, Uncle Elliott would tiptoe to the window for a conference with the courteous but unemotional man in charge.

"How are the Reitz tickets going?" he would inquire.

"Good."

"How many have you sold this morning?"

"Have to figure that out."

"Think we'll have a good house."

"Yes."

This dialogue with minute variations was repeated at short intervals for an hour. Then Uncle Elliott recalled an important executives' meeting which he had announced for this morning, and departed suddenly, leaving behind him a request for telephonic information of the progress of the sale.

A little while later, Dorothy was called to the telephone. Uncle Elliott wished to assure her that there would be a good house. Well, there ought to be! Hadn't the heavy

"Our Little Girl"

newspaper advertising of weeks back been supplemented with posters on every spot? If any man, woman or child in New York didn't know that Dorothy Reitz was giving a concert in Carnegie Hall tonight—it was a blind man, woman or child, that was all! Why did Uncle Elliott have to disturb her with such information? She would have to rest today. Rest, rest, rest. She must be composed tonight. There would be a big house, of course, but the big house wasn't so important. The big critics would be there, and she simply had to have good reviews. Why couldn't relatives leave artists alone?

Uncle Elliott, Arnold—he was annoying, too. He had planned to stay away from his office that day so that he might take care of her and attend to things for her. Could anything be more absurd! She didn't need anybody to take care of things for her. Not Arnold, anyhow. He was nice enough; he meant well enough. Heaven knows he was a good husband, but it was terrible to have him hanging around at a time like this! She had had to do everything except throw him bodily out of the suite. Tonight, he would stay about the dressing-room—not if she could help it! She remembered how he had taken possession of her a year ago at her *début*. What a little fool she had been in those days! It was ghastly to think of it. Thank God her mother was in Europe. That sticky Madame Graaberg wouldn't be around to give her helpful advice. Goldstein wouldn't be in the way. He knew when to keep quiet. She had decided to retain him for that reason only. He realized that an artist needed rest. He realized the distinction between the artist and her surroundings. He knew his place. A virtuoso might not.

God, what an artist had to go through! What a battle it had been to break free from Madame Schneider, now

Miss Eldridge of the Metropolitan. What had become of her? They hired a lot of these young singers every year and then—oh, what difference did it make what had become of Madame Schneider? She had flickered out. Why shouldn't she flicker out? She was just a flash. What would she say if she met Dorothy now? It was funny to think that she had wanted to study with Soedlich when she was a child. How she had grown! She was still one of the youngest singers before the public, but it was years and years and years since she had emerged from the sacred halls of St. Cecilia's. What a place St. Cecilia's was, with its lectures, its classes, its rules, its prim teachers, its stupid recitals! It was like her family to send her off to St. Cecilia's.

What had she learned at St. Cecilia's, anyhow? Routine, a few mechanics, a smattering of musical history and repertoire. Two years for that! Thoroughness. They called it thorough because it took so long to learn so little. She had had to make her own way, artistically. Perhaps it would have been better if there hadn't been so much money. Struggle was good for the soul.

But hadn't she struggled? Hadn't she struggled against the family, against her mother, and now—now she was struggling against Arnold. She had hardly realized that before. He didn't understand her. She had developed the soul of an artist, and his soul—where was his soul? Things had always come easily to him. God, and *she* had come easily to him!

Dorothy interlocked her hands and pressed them sharply. She clasped her knees and pulled herself together with a little shudder. God, she had simply given herself to Arnold! No wonder he treated her lightly. He had just waited about until she was nervous about her début and taken her. He had married her—but how was

"Our Little Girl"

he better than any corner lounge, who wanted her only for her charms? For what else did Arnold want her? Where was there any difference between his motives and the lounge's? The lounge, at least, probably didn't want to exploit her. He wasn't so damnably proud of being seen with a pretty woman! Arnold——

Yes, she understood many things now. Hereafter, Arnold would have to pay for anything he got. She had been his woman, his married woman, but what more? He didn't understand her. He didn't know that she had her own life to live. He didn't know anything. If he irritated her again, she would leave him. She didn't need him. He was just a good-looking nobody. A smart boy. He would be a drag on her, a millstone, a handicap. What a damned fool she had been——

She found herself sobbing. She jumped up and looked in the mirror. Her face was white and her eyes were red. She had a recital tonight. She couldn't look like this. She snatched up her powder-puff. What good would that do? Rouge. It would cover up her face, but her soul—and her voice! She was afraid to sing now. If she opened her mouth, what kind of tones would come forth? Suppose she had agitated herself to the point where her vocal chords had been affected? Why was she looking in the mirror? She couldn't see her voice.

If her voice was gone, the recital would have to be postponed. What would people say then? She could imagine Harper grinning and saying that the little lady never could sing worth a whoop. She had to show the Underwood bureau that it didn't know a real artist when it had one. And Tommy might make use of some such event to bring forward Rosè Manning. What, in passing, would Rose Manning say if she knew how Tommy had thrown himself at Dorothy, almost wept before her,

pleaded with her to marry him? The ass! All men were asses!

This inspiring thought encouraged her. She bowed to the mirror as though the audience were seated behind it, glanced back to an imaginary accompanist, smiled, and sang. The voice was good. What had she been worrying about? She was in good condition. But she needed rest.

The doorbell rang. She heard Lena open the door and heard Arnold's voice. What was he doing around here at this time of day? She had told him specifically to go to his office. He was asking Lena how his wife was. The impudent idiot! He would hang around all day, pawing her, and asking her whether her voice was still in good "shape." She slammed the door of her room suddenly and rang for Lena.

"Lena," she said imperiously, "I'm going to sleep now. Tell Mr. Deering that. Tell him I'm not to be disturbed by anybody at all. I won't see anybody. I've got to rest. I don't want to see anybody!"

She almost shrieked the last command and half shoved Lena out of the door. She locked herself in and fell on the bed.

A long time afterwards she awoke. Had she been dreaming? What time was it? Was it tomorrow, and had she overslept, forgetting all about the recital? It was the end of the world. Go to sleep just before your recital and forget to sing it! What were people saying now?

She shook herself and noticed the clock on the little table beside the bed. It was two o'clock in the afternoon. Which afternoon? Had she slept more than twenty-four hours? Oh, nonsense! What was wrong with her?

She pressed the bell for Lena, who rapped at the door. Dorothy had forgotten that she had locked herself in. A

"Our Little Girl"

stupid thing to do. Suppose she really had overslept—who could have aroused her in time for the concert?

Lena wanted to know whether Miss Dorothy wanted any lunch. Lunch?

"A little something," Dorothy suggested, "but no more. I can't eat, you know."

Two o'clock. She would have to be at Carnegie Hall at eight. Six hours. How was the voice now? She tried a few notes. They were thick and muffled. What had happened to her while she was asleep? She ran to the wash-stand and gargled. Then she sang again. Nothing wrong with the voice. Sleep had got into it.

Lena brought in a tray of toast, chops, peas, salad and tea. Dorothy looked at the food. She wasn't hungry. What was the use of filling up before a recital? She nibbled at a chop. It tasted like nothing. Was she nervous? Was she losing her sense of taste? She shoved the tray aside and rang for Lena.

"I simply can't eat," she declared.

"But you should, miss," advised Lena. "You'll be feeling faint——"

"Leave that to me."

She waved Lena out of the room with a fine sweep of the arm. Then she rang for her again.

"Where's Mr. Deering?" she demanded.

"He told me to say," replied Lena, "that he was going for a little ride and would be back shortly."

That was good. She was afraid that Arnold would wait around for her and irritate her with affection. She must be alone now. She ought to rest.

"Lena," she said, "wake me at six. Not before. Don't let anybody in. I'm not home. I'm asleep. I may not be disturbed. I don't care what you say, but don't let anybody in, and don't you dare to forget to wake me at six."

She lay down again. The sun was coming into the bedroom. Again she rang for Lena.

"Pull down the shades. See that no light comes in."

She was annoyed by the little cracks of light that peeped about the edges of the shades. She would call Lena and insist that they be blotted out. But Lena would make a terrible noise doing that. Leave bad enough alone. If it were all over now! It was terrible what artists had to go through. People ought to let her alone.

She dozed restlessly for several hours. Every now and then she would wake up, glance at the clock, see that little time had passed and bury her head in the pillow, desperately striving to stifle wakefulness. She felt herself perspiring—it was a cool day—why should one perspire in October? Perhaps she was getting ill—what was wrong with her—it made no difference—oh, she must rest——

Finally, Lena entered.

"It's six o'clock, miss."

Dorothy looked up. Six o'clock. Getting dark outside. Time to dress. She submitted to the sartorial operations of Lena, who knew how to administer a gown painlessly. The mirror told her that she looked beautiful, but pale. What were the lights at Carnegie Hall? A good make-up and soft lights would be best. Her hair really was charming tonight. If only it wouldn't tempt Arnold to play with it! Now and then he became sportive and toyed with her hair. Well, if he touched her at all, she'd slap his face.

A rap at the door. Arnold.

"What do you want?"

His voice came cheerily from the hall.

"Feeling all right? Want a little dinner?"

Dinner? Why this emphasis on food? Yet it wouldn't do to sing after a day's fast. She would try to eat some-

"Our Little Girl"

thing. Who was that singer who used to eat a whole turkey before going on the stage? Some Italian. Who was it? Was she losing her memory? Thank Heaven for the little book of words tonight. That would pull her over any lapses—but what if she should forget the music? Could Goldstein rescue her?

"Try to eat something, dear."

Arnold's voice came in gratefully on these thoughts.

"I'm not hungry."

"Eat what's too much first."

A silly remark. Her father had said that once upon a time. Poor man, how long it seemed that he was dead! He would have been fearfully proud tonight. She sat up. After all, she was a prima donna. She had a big house. She had an audience. There would be an air of expectancy. Dorothy Reitz was going to sing!

She saw again the audience in front of her, filling the house to the last chair, applauding, while she bowed graciously and smiled sweetly to Goldstein by way of signaling for an encore. And then there would be reviews, and the critics would note that she had come into her own. And there would be foreign impresarios there, with contracts waiting to leap from inner pockets, and probably the great Gatti would come from his throne at the Metropolitan Opera House to hint in his infinitely diplomatic manner that it might be worth her while to study "Butterfly," for who could tell who would sing "Butterfly" before the Golden Horseshoe next year?

And so the reverie unfolded, plaudits in Paris fading into riots in Rome, and bravos in Berlin turning to ovations in Vienna. The people would be waiting for her at a stage door, bearing strange gifts and strewing her pathway with gay flowers. There would be receptions at which men in bright uniforms would bend low over

her outstretched hand and kiss it and sigh for the loveliness which they had heard, the loveliness which they had seen, the loveliness which they could not hope to have.

"We'd better go."

Arnold had ended the reverie.

Dorothy felt dazed as she entered the Carnegie Hall stage door and climbed to the artist's dressing-room. Uncle Elliott, looking hot, excited and efficient, greeted her. The audience was a little slow in arriving, but she might as well be ready. Goldstein, chewing his ever-present cigarette, paced about calmly in the hallway, revealing a new accomplishment. He could smoke and whistle a Strauss waltz simultaneously. Arnold hovered about and finally left with Uncle Elliott.

She consulted the mirror. The vision there was heartening.

"How do you think I look?" she asked Goldstein.

"Grand."

He always summed up matters briefly.

She played about with powder and rouge until Goldstein suggested that they might as well begin.

It was strangely like her first recital. Her program was built on the same order, and her emotions followed the same sequence. She hardly saw the audience, which seemed to be spread about the great auditorium, until her final group. Then she noticed that there were many vacant seats. But she would sing for those who had come. It seemed to her that she was singing easily and well. Were her tones reaching that immeasurably distant gallery? She was tempted to call out and ask the occupants of the upper tier whether they were enjoying the concert. And then came the end of the printed program, and encores, and a reception, at which all sorts of people shook hands with her, and Freron, Madame Graaberg, Tommy,

"Our Little Girl"

Rose Manning, Soedlich, everybody seemed to flash by. She introduced Arnold to this person or that. It was good to have him around now. He diverted the stream of handshakers. If they only would go. She wanted to cry. There was no reason for it. She just wanted to cry. At last Arnold led her to the automobile. Did she want to go to a restaurant? A little dancing would be good for her. No? The poor girl was weary. She almost fell asleep in his arms on the way home.

It was so good to have him about. She was nerveless. She didn't know what was happening. She didn't care. Something had snapped, leaving her relaxed, tired, heedless. Arnold was such a comfort. He was so kind, so sweet. She had treated him terribly. But he would understand.

"My little prima donna," he murmured over and over again, kissing her at every repetition.

One could forget in his arms. After the strain of an artist's life, his caresses were the healing balm of home.

She had almost forgotten the critics. But when Arnold came to her room as she was eating breakfast in bed, she remembered that there had been a recital last night and that she had given it. Arnold's face was white. He was restraining tears with an all too obvious effort.

"Dot," he choked out, "maybe I'd better read them to you."

She pushed aside the breakfast tray.

Could they have slashed her as they had been known to slash artists on occasions? What did they know about music, anyhow? Ignorant reporters, sent to destroy the work of artists who had devoted their lives to——

"I'll look at them."

Arnold handed her the morning papers. He put his arm about her and kissed her as she read them.

She sobbed as she scanned the reviews. All of them harped on the over-advertising of Dorothy Reitz. She was termed a good-looking mediocrity, an ambitious priestess of the commonplace, a singer of pretension but no great talent, a performer who had not improved materially in anything except advertising matter since her début last season, and just an ordinary singer who had the added disadvantage of being exploited as though she were a toilet soap.

"But it doesn't make any difference," Arnold insisted, and now he was weeping unreservedly, "it doesn't make any difference what they say about you, I still believe in you, I'll always love you, I don't care what they say."

So this was the end of the adventure. Scant, derogatory comments. She hurled the papers to the floor. What was the use of singing when this was the reception?

Arnold, his eyes large with tears, took her in his arms.

"I love you," he repeated endlessly. It was his formula in face of the mockery of the world.

Exhausted, she slept through the morning. In the afternoon, she asked Arnold for the evening papers.

"You don't want to see them, dear," he said. "It's just the same thing. They don't know any more than the others."

He put his arms about her and slipped his hand in hers. She felt something soft and bulky against her palm. It was a package. She unwrapped it to find a brilliant pendant, suspended from a platinum chain, studded with diamonds.

"Arnold!"

He was too good! She wept—she never knew how long.

It was a glorious thing. She put it about her neck. It sparkled. Her eyes reflected its lustre. If only she could

“Our Little Girl”

have worn it last night! But those critics—what difference would that have made to them! Asses! Ignorant asses!

A line of advertising in the newspaper which lay at her feet almost almost struck her in the face.

“You heard Mme. Dorothy Reitz last night,” it announced. “Read the criticisms, and you’ll find that authorities agree with you that Dorothy Reitz is *the* American singer for American music lovers.

“Have *you* heard Dorothy Reitz?”

Oh God, what stupid stuff! What a muddle everything was! What was it all about, anyhow? Why couldn’t they let her alone? They didn’t understand her!

XXIV

ANTICLIMAX

There was an air of mourning about the Deering suite in the days following the recital. Dorothy first feared to go out, lest she meet some one who would observe that the critics had not been kind to her. Later, she decided that the world at large wasn't worth worrying about but that it would be inconvenient to collide with Maxwell or Harper, for instance, or Freron or some one else who might find pleasure in the journalistic calumnies which Dorothy had been compelled to endure. Finally, Arnold almost dragged her to a restaurant where they danced and where they met acquaintances who either exercised tact or displayed ignorance, for they made no references to Dorothy's recent venture.

Uncle Elliott stayed away for three days after the concert. When he arrived, he was grave. He said that he didn't know much about music but that he knew what he liked and that he certainly did like Dorothy's work, even if the newspapermen didn't. The booking man he had hired had set a lot of dates for Dorothy contingent on a success in New York. Perhaps it would be better to postpone these for the present. He had instructed Singleton to stop the advertising until the public mind was better composed to receive it. It was a question of markets. The market wasn't ready for Dorothy. The house had been mostly paper. It might take years to sell Dorothy to the American public, but the American public's good taste and intelligence eventually comes to the front, and Dorothy would yet be the biggest thing in the concert game!

"Our Little Girl"

Goldstein was irritatingly calm about the whole aspect of things.

"You flop once," he remarked, "and the next time you may clean up. Depends how things break."

But whatever the critics said, whatever the advertising policy of the Reitz Concert Corporation was developing into, whatever the breaks may have been, Dorothy discovered that Arnold was a real comfort. He still appreciated her. Of evenings he would ask her to sing old French songs for him. He had never been interested in such music before. It was wonderful how he sympathized, how he felt and how he understood. He was no sweet boy. He was a man, a very real man. And he was beginning to develop a splendid taste in music.

It was Arnold who suggested that they attend Rose Manning's recital. He wanted to know more about such things. Dorothy's objection that Rose was a beginner, a dull coloratura, nothing more than a pretty child with a little voice, availed nothing. Arnold insisted that it would be good for Dorothy to hear another singer, especially one who couldn't sing as well as she could. They would go to the recital and then they would go dancing. Wouldn't it be fun to go back to the Battle Royale? Did she remember the first time he took her there? How innocent both of them were! A wiggly dancer had shocked them! And now——

Dorothy heard murmurs as she paraded down the aisle with Arnold at Aeolian Hall at Rose's concert. Were they saying that this was the woman who had received such bad notices at her Carnegie Hall recital? She listened sharply.

"What a gorgeous evening coat!"

They were admiring her. Probably they didn't even know who she was. The men who stared at her were

amusing. Did they know that she was more than an attractive woman? Did they know that she was an artist?

Artist? Some of the critics—but she would put the critics out of her mind. Many great artists had been assailed early in their careers and had survived to have the critics fawn before them.

She opened the program and examined Rose's list of songs.

"Look at this, Arnold!" she exclaimed, "this is the wildest program I ever saw. She used to be a coloratura and now she's singing a collection of spirituals and unheard-of things. Every other song is 'first time.' I suppose she thinks she'll get the critics that way."

What sort of recital was this? The conventional order of things had been disregarded. To open with a group of negro spirituals was absurd! And then a group of settings of poems by Shakespeare—a mixture of old and new settings. Then a group of settings of modern poets. What was this? The Manning girl was a vivacious trick, but she never would have thought of building a program about the texts. And finally a group of settings of American poets by American composers.

"She's saving money," observed Dorothy. "I never heard of that accompanist—Victor Gale. It's a queer-looking affair."

"I liked yours much better," agreed Arnold, squeezing her arm.

He mustn't do that in public. Not in a concert hall.

"Shh!"

"Shhhh!"

The woman back of her shushed at her as she tried to hush up Arnold. A patter of applause indicated that Rose was on the platform. Well, Rose hadn't changed much. She looked a little more dignified, but her red hair was

"Our Little Girl"

as saucy as ever and she had a flip little way with her. Yet as she stood by the piano, smiling, she displayed undeniable poise.

It wasn't much of a house. There were bad gaps in the front and back. Paper, of course. Dorothy could see people walking in with punched tickets, the outward evidences of unpaid admissions. But why should anyone pay to hear Rose Manning? Who was she? She looked as though she belonged in musical comedy, and when that little voice——

Victor Gale, a tall, blond pianist, struck a few chords with surprising gentleness. And——

*"I look away yonder, what do I see?
John's gone down on de Island in de mornin'."*

Was this the voice of Rose Manning, erstwhile coloratura? The freshness of the tone wasn't so surprising, but whence the firmness and power and the superb diction? Dorothy was surprised.

*"I haven't been to heav'n, but I've been told,
John's gone down on de Island in de mornin',
De streets are pearl an' de gates are gold,
John's gone down on de Island in de mornin',
In de mornin', in de mornin',
John's gone down on de Island in de mornin'."*

What had happened to Rose? How was it that this little, pretty, red-haired flapper had acquired fine, brilliant tones, that swept up triumphantly on the climax and died at the end.

"I liked that," whispered Arnold.

Dorothy scowled at him. The girl could sing—anybody could hear that—and yet—she oughtn't to sing so well—there was something wrong. Certainly, there shouldn't be so much applause on an opening song. Per-

haps the Underwood bureau had rented the claque for Rose. You could have anything in this business if you paid for it. Why hadn't she thought of a claque—but a real artist didn't need a claque.

Rose evidently was meeting with uproarious approval. There were few flowers—nothing like the mass which Dorothy had received the week before—but the plaudits were continuous, and the encores numerous. Rose had two tricks which Dorothy despised. She asked the accompanist to share the applause and she announced her encores.

*"I fly high—why?—my die
Is cast for heaven!"*

Rose was concluding the printed list with "A Rhyme of Rhymes," a curio which brought handclapping before Rose had ended her last high note. The crowd rushed for the platform. Rose sang and sang—finally she came out, bringing her accompanist by the hand.

"This is too kind of you," she said, and immediately Dorothy heard all the women say, "Isn't she too sweet for words!" "I can't tell you how grateful I am—but Mr. Gale has been working so hard—and the house force is getting restless—and we'll do another song—and it's my choice—a little thing I really like a great deal—Mr. Gale wrote it!"

They turned out the lights after this song and there was a crowding towards the doors which led to the artist's reception-room in the basement. Dorothy thought that it would be a gracious thing to drop in on Rose and to congratulate her on her success. Undoubtedly the girl had won her audience, but whether it was an artistic triumph was sorely debatable. She had sung well—surprisingly well—who could have taught her how to sing that way?—but she had used her good looks and her charm for all

"Our Little Girl"

they were worth. And they were worth a great deal.

Rose was in the centre of a vortex which threatened to sweep her down in a whirl of kisses, handshakes, congratulations and tears. Harper, smiling happily, was trying to form the mob into an orderly line. Tommy stood near Rose, chatting with Gale, who plainly was pleased with the events of the evening. Rose waved to Dorothy and motioned for her to come over.

"So glad you came!" said Rose, as Dorothy and Arnold approached.

There were introductions and congratulations.

"I want to see you sometime," commented Rose. "Couldn't we have tea and talk things over?"

It would be rather noble to invite her for luncheon.

"Lunch with me at my apartment—shall we say next Monday?" suggested Dorothy.

"Monday it is," laughed Rose. "And please congratulate Tommy Borge—of course you know Tommy Borge—I've him to thank for it all. I'll tell you why Monday."

Congratulate Tommy! What for? What had Tommy to do with this recital? And why was there any cause for congratulations? The time to present congratulations, Dorothy reflected, would be after the reviews had been published. But if one waited for the reviews there might not be any congratulations.

"The little girl can sing."

Dorothy turned angrily as Arnold volunteered this lay comment.

"I suppose you think she's a good singer because she has nice red hair and a pretty little figure and——"

Arnold grinned and squeezed Dorothy's arm.

"I liked yours better," he asserted. "But really, Dot, I enjoyed the concert. I never thought I'd enjoy a concert that much."

"Wait until you hear a real singer," scoffed Dorothy.

"Oh, all right; you know more about it than I do. And now let's go dancing."

Dorothy was in ill humor. Of course, Rose Manning was no startling artist—it was doubtful whether she was an artist at all—but her recital had stirred a sort of applause which Dorothy had never heard at her own appearances. She remembered one of Madame Graaberg's sayings: "The applause a great artist gets you feel; other applause you hear." Rose Manning was not a great artist, but the applause could be felt. Some one had taught her how to play on an audience. That probably had been the contribution for which Tommy was to have been felicitated. He liked to dramatize situations. What a little ass he had been when he proposed to her! Did Rose Manning know that?

The Battle Royale had changed little since Arnold had introduced Dorothy to its dusky charms. The crowd seemed to have remained in its places since that night and the expressions on the faces of the habitués had not shifted, nor, apparently, the faces. The waiters still shuffled about in their peering but discreet fashion, and the band still emitted its muffled cacophonies from the recesses of genuine African palms.

"Remember the first time we were here?"

Arnold's question annoyed Dorothy. She had been a mere baby then—a baby not only in years but in experience. She didn't like to be reminded of her age of innocence. She was a woman now, a woman of more than average distinction. For all Arnold knew, the diners were whispering to one another now that the lady who had just arrived was Dorothy Reitz, the singer, and her husband. That was Arnold's position—"her husband." And now he was asking her whether she remembered their first

"Our Little Girl"

visit, as though Arnold had brought her into prominence since that time.

"Did you ask me something?" she snapped suddenly. "Oh, yes—the first time you took me here. I remember it dimly. You were shocked to death by something—I don't remember what—and you took me home. I never knew whether it was to spare my blushes or yours."

Arnold tittered. She didn't like this response. She knew what he was thinking. He was feeling elated because the denizens of the Battle Royale were staring at her and envying Arnold the privilege of pressing her arm intimately. He liked to feel that he was stepping out into the gay life of the big city, with a partner who would attract comment. He liked to exploit a beautiful woman—his woman—and Dorothy was exhibited here as the sort of woman Arnold could capture when he spread his nets.

She withdrew her arm from his as they followed the headwaiter to a table. She wouldn't be his entry in a beauty race, if that was his view of her.

"Let's dance."

He would take her on the floor, grip her tightly and swing her about ostentatiously so that all might know that Arnold Deering not only could get beautiful women but hold them! No! She wouldn't let him do that.

"I'm tired, Arnold."

"How can you be, dear? Why the evening's young——"

"I'm too tired to dance, really."

He looked at her sulkily.

"You weren't too tired the last time we were here."

It was a nasty remark. She didn't know exactly what Arnold meant by it, but it had a vicious ring to it.

"Maybe you could have had a better time tonight if you'd taken a flapper with you."

This would hit him.

It did.

Arnold reached across the table for her hands, which she withdrew. He looked at her beseechingly.

"Now you know I didn't mean anything like that," he pleaded, "and if you don't feel like dancing, why——"

She smiled and studied the bill of fare which the waiter had placed before her. She noticed a newcomer on the menu—chop suey. These African resorts were growing more and more native. She might as well eat something, possibly Chicken Chop Suey à la Baltimore, a dish marked "special and ready," and which probably would furnish gustatory amusement of sorts. Arnold would ask her to let him have some of it on the side. He had acquired the sentimental notion of tasting his wife's food, the mouthful being a sort of pledge of devotion. What a beautifully sloppy soul he was, anyhow! First he would clutch her hand and thrust it at the populace to demonstrate his virtuosity as a lover, and then he would eat humbly out of the same hand.

"Have you made up your mind?"

She looked up, wondering why people studied menu cards so intently without arriving at any decision.

"Oh, yes——"

And then she saw a familiar figure passing by the table. It was Tommy Borge, rather awkward in evening clothes which fitted him theoretically but which looked out of place practically, accompanying Rose Manning. The vision of Rose Manning, who obviously was winning the attention of all of the men and most of the women in the room, annoyed Dorothy. No, she wouldn't try Chicken Chop Suey à la Baltimore. Why stay at all?

"I see your old friend Tommy's fussing his little singer."

"Our Little Girl"

That sounded like Arnold. It was supposed to be a pleasantry, but why did he have to refer to Rose?

It would be best to get away as quickly as possible. Rose's presence would be irritating tonight, and it was reasonably certain that Rose would discover Dorothy and Arnold and come over for a chat. Tommy would have to come along, which might provide some entertainment, for Dorothy knew that she could embarrass Tommy immeasurably, although really, Tommy wasn't worth embarrassing. For that matter, she could embarrass both Rose and Tommy; or would they be able to disclaim that night on the Fifth Avenue bus when Tommy had his arm vulgarly about Rose?

And why had she invited Rose to luncheon? It was well enough to ask people to meals, but was it manners to accept such proffers? Could she tell Rose that she had made a mistake and invited her for a day on which she was already engaged? She might do that, and yet Rose might make another appointment. It would be just as well to get it over with. But Rose somehow got on her nerves. She was tired of seeing Rose. She would go. Of course, Arnold would object, but she could buy him off with a dance.

"I'm tired, Arnold."

He looked up in a pained way.

"Why should you be tired?" he demanded.

"I just am, dear," she said with her best appeal; "you'll take me home, won't you?"

"But you haven't eaten anything."

What did that have to do with it?

"Must I?"

He shook her hands gently.

"Tell you what. We'll have a little ice-cream and then we'll go straight home."

A simple enough stratagem. Arnold informed the waiter of the decision, and rose to dance.

"Let's dance while they send out for the cream," he urged.

"Only one!"

"One's almost enough—with you!"

He was in his flattering mood now. Dorothy knew that his conversation throughout the dance would consist of references to the inevitable jealousy of other men who envied him such a lovely and gifted wife, to the charm of her contours, facial and bodily, and to the delighted astonishment with which he contemplated the notion that he had never dreamed of such happiness a year ago. Her worst anticipations were realized, for Arnold indulged himself not only in these reflections but in the intriguing thought that no man would ever be unfaithful to his wife if that wife were like Dorothy. As a climax he suggested that it was a good thing that he was married to Dorothy: were he married to another woman, Dorothy, as she looked tonight, might tempt him to unvirtuous thoughts.

Arnold worked his palms vigorously to force encores from the musicos, but the leader, for reasons of his own, left the stand and his associates followed him into the background of native African rubber plants. Dorothy sat down to the ice-cream.

"And now we'll go," she said.

Arnold looked at her sadly.

"Just one more."

"No!"

She plunged a spoon savagely into the soft little lump of ice-cream before her.

Tommy and Rose came to their table. There was an exchange of desultory compliments, and then Tommy broached the purpose of the visit. Would Arnold and

"Our Little Girl"

Dorothy care to dance? Arnold brightened visibly, but looked to Dorothy for a definite answer.

"We're very sorry," said Dorothy sweetly, "but we simply must go home now. It's very good of you to ask us."

With that she got up, bowed, and started to go, dragging Arnold with her as by unseen chains. Rose and Tommy waved a farewell after them, reciprocated by Arnold but not by Dorothy. Why this intimacy?

Arnold was gloomy all the way home. He had taken her there to dance. It would have been good for both of them. Why did she refuse to do that little thing for him? Couldn't she forget her prima-donna airs with him?

If that was the way he felt about it, she decided, he needn't go out with her at all. The reference to prima-donna airs was decidedly in bad taste. So was his habit of pawing her and squeezing her on every occasion. If he couldn't treat her like a woman—she didn't expect him to appreciate her as an artist; he liked little things with pretty ankles, like Rose Manning—he might at least not treat her as a girl he had picked up on the sidewalks. That was all there was to it.

When they arrived at home she rushed into her room and locked herself in. Arnold should have learned from his Hollywood experiences that Dorothy wasn't to be trifled with, that she had her own life to live, that she was a personality. Heavens, what a husband! Why couldn't she have waited and married some one who would have understood her and respected her? Arnold was pleasant enough in his way, but—oh, well, there would be a split soon. It wasn't that he treated her badly. If he did, she would know what to do about it. He treated her without understanding. She wasn't his toy—no, not

even a toy to be worshipped. She was—something else that he couldn't understand and that was an end to it.

The next day's papers hailed the most interesting artist, the best singer, the most charming personality, the most intelligent recital, the finest program, a little wonder of voice and originality, and generally hurled about eulogies until readers accustomed to the cursory chronicle of musical events wondered what had happened and began to search for announcements of other concerts by this new marvel. Not only was Rose Manning the finest singer in many years, declared one critic (aged 26), but her charm and unpretentiousness shone even more glowingly by contrast with certain heavily advertised and expensively heralded sopranos who turned out to be conservatory mediocrities.

XXV

SYMPHONIE PATHETIQUE

The towering structure of nerves which Dorothy had been erecting over several years came crashing down as she read the reviews which had been bestowed on Rose Manning. As she looked at the newspapers, the bastinados which had been her lot seemed to stand up next to the hysterical rhapsodies on Rose. At one recital Rose had leaped to the stars; after a year of steady work Dorothy was groveling among the incompetents. Was it fair that all of her efforts, all of her ambition, all of her organized support should bring her to a point below that from which she had started? What had Rose done that she had not?

She hardly knew what she was thinking as she sat in the drawing-room, glancing first at one newspaper, then at another. Her career was ruined. The conviction became stronger and stronger as the afternoon wore on. She was already in the discard. She had aged fifty years since last night. She looked at Rose's reviews again and again and cried softly. One word came hurtling constantly from one review—"unpretentious." Rose had triumphed because she had been "unpretentious," and the implied slur on the gaudy advertising which had been designed to make Dorothy Reitz another Jenny Lind hit Dorothy like a hammer. She was "pretentious." She was an over-exploited mediocrity. She was an ambitious failure. She was—nobody.

Nobody? After all, what had she done? Her career was only a year old. She had sung three times in that

interval but she had the feeling that she had been constantly before the public. She had lived with the idea that she was a prima donna and the idea had mastered her. Odd, how this truth overwhelmed her with horrible clarity at this moment. The ultimate cruelty had been inflicted on her: she was ridiculous in her own eyes.

And yet, was she such a terrible singer? Her first reviews hadn't been bad—but now she understood them. They were the charitable nothings that genially disposed writers awarded to harmless beginners. They were little, very little tributes to youthful and smiling mediocrity. She had forgotten that she was young. She was not yet twenty-four, and yet she had all the airs of a retired diva. If she could only stand again where she stood a year ago!

There might have been other roads. She shouldn't have given that first recital. Why had she plunged into this life before she was equipped for it? And then she had married. Was that a mistake?

Arnold was a good man. He had been kind to her. What if he liked to exploit her charms? After all that was a tribute to her. It wasn't fair to Arnold to look on it as an expression of his own vanity. Thank God she *had* married Arnold Deering. He would comfort her now. He would take her away, perhaps. To him she would never be a pretentious mediocrity.

With the kindly assistance of a few headache powders, she managed to go to sleep until Arnold, returning from his office, awoke her with a kiss. She was glad to see him. Whatever came, he would always be at hand to console her, to cherish her, to love her.

"I'm blue," she told him simply, when he inquired gently as to her health; "please cheer me up."

He stroked her hair solicitously and suggested a drive and a little dancing at an all-winter resort along the Boston

"Our Little Girl"

Post Road. She assented, and he grasped her in a surprised and delightful way.

"Dot!" he cried out, "you don't know how happy you've made me! Why, you're your old self again."

"I don't know what I am, Arnold," she said, "I feel—oh, what does it matter how I feel? Do you still love me?"

"I'll always love you!"

He gripped her violently and kissed her with great fire. She reveled in his kisses. They were untrammelled. They were sincere. They were the kisses of admiration. She loved him. He was apart from the politics, the scheming, the blows and the trumpery of the musical world. He was no artist; he was a man. The epigram appealed to her.

Rose Manning had been almost forgotten when Dorothy's date-pad on the desk reminded her that the new star would be present for luncheon on Monday. Why did she have to see this girl? If Rose had been a—mediocrity, it wouldn't have mattered, but Rose had achieved such laurels that it would be painful to have her about. From her own heights, Rose would hold forth pleasantly, perhaps, but surely condescendingly. She couldn't stand condescension from Rose. Who was she? She hadn't even been considered very seriously at St. Cecilia's.

But if this luncheon was to be a victory for Rose, Rose shouldn't know of it. Dorothy spent two hours in dressing and preparing herself for the meal, which had been selected with a rare degree of finesse. Rose would see that her hostess was a woman of taste, of refinement, of culture. Critics might raise Rose to musical heights which Dorothy could not climb. But there were other heights to which critics could not raise one.

Yet if Rose had any notions of gloating over Dorothy they were not discernible to Dorothy. The slight copper-haired girl tripped in at the appointed hour, and greeted Dorothy much as she used to in the student days. Dorothy noticed that the voice was steadier, the speech slower, and that the little nervous mannerisms had disappeared. There was a certain dignity beneath the youthfulness of Rose.

The customary comments on the state of the weather, the state of the health, the state of the world and the state of the servant supply passed quickly and easily. Dorothy wanted to draw from Rose the reasons for her success and Rose seemed far more interested in the furnishing of the apartment than in music. Whenever Dorothy inquired about a song, Rose would inquire about a brass kettle. Dorothy was wearying of this fencing. She had anticipated a conflict—and Rose was merely an amiable young soul, whose chief diversion seemed to be bronze antiques.

"Ever go to Allen Street?" Rose asked, without waiting for an answer. "It's a wonderful place. There's one shop where you can get the most remarkable copper stuff at prices so low that—well, you wouldn't believe them possible, that's all. You know I've always been fascinated by those long, snaky candlesticks—would you believe that I burn real candles in them?—and they cost a young fortune uptown, but——"

Dorothy dropped a spoon, and Rose paused until the disturbance caused by this move had quieted down. Then Dorothy renewed the conversation.

"The other night," she said, "you told us to congratulate Tommy Borge on your success. You must pardon me, but I didn't——"

"People don't," interrupted Rose. "People don't ap-

"Our Little Girl"

preciate Tommy. He's a genius. He made up my program. He found that gorgeous accompanist. Where do you think he dug him up? In a jazz band! Tommy says the light jazz touch they're using in the better dance orchestras is just the thing for accompanying, and this man Gale certainly proved it. Usually the critics say something about a sympathetic accompanist, but they raved about Gale."

"I never thought Tommy was a genius," commented Dorothy.

He was smart now and then, but if he was a genius, Arnold was a god.

"You don't know him," objected Rose.

She folded her hands and looked at Dorothy solemnly.

"I know all about you and Tommy," she said. "You know he's been in love with you for years—and you've treated him—well, you haven't exactly encouraged him. I don't suppose you know what happened when he heard of your engagement."

This was interesting. Tommy had been an ardent lover, although a peripatetic and shy one. Probably he had taken the matter greatly to heart. But what woman really could love anyone like Tommy?

"Tommy broke down and cried," Rose continued. "He was in a terrible state. He called me up a few nights later and begged me to let him come up for a little while. He said he was going crazy from being alone with his thoughts. I didn't know him so well then, but I felt that he needed a friend—and I asked him to come over. He told me everything. I felt funny there, acting as mother to a man of twenty-seven, and telling him that he'd get over it. He really loved you if ever a man loved a woman. I could have killed you that night, my dear."

Rose smiled whimsically.

"But that wouldn't have helped much," she went on. "I made it a point to cheer up Tommy. I called him up at the office, I invited him to take me out, I'd drop in on him at unexpected times—it wasn't really much of my business, but I felt sorry for anyone who could love so deeply and honestly and so ineffectively.

"And then, my dear—then something happened. I found that I was falling in love with this overgrown child. I used to watch him in action and he knew his business. There was that side to him. And he understood things. A few months after he was pretty well over his infatuation, he told me just how you would make out as a singer—and he had it right at every point."

"What!"

This was as brutal a thrust as Dorothy had ever encountered. So Tommy had gone about telling people that she couldn't sing. Tommy concealed a sting about him and when he released it, it usually was sharp. And Tommy had told everyone what he thought of her as a singer and had predicted her failure!

"Do you mean," demanded Dorothy, "that he went about discussing me with everybody?"

What business was it of his?

Rose showed no signs of recognizing her diplomatic error.

"He didn't go around talking about you," she said. "Why, that poor boy loved you so he wouldn't have said anything against you. He just told me once before your recital——"

Dorothy didn't listen to the end of the sentence. She knew what it would be. She knew that her face was burning. Tommy had actually predicted the failure to Rose and had probably triumphed when the prediction became a reality. Of all people, why did he confide in Rose?

"Our Little Girl"

"I think he's a little wretch!"

Dorothy relieved herself by abusing Tommy. She poured out her contempt for him. He was a clumsy lout, a silly show-off, an idiot, a conceited ass, a——

"But he really isn't," interrupted Rose gravely and amiably. "Not when you know him."

"Know him!" snorted Dorothy. "Didn't he almost shoot himself before my very eyes because I wouldn't marry him! Didn't he look at me like a dying calf every time I came into the office? Didn't he do everything he could to make an impression on me? Don't tell me I don't know Tommy Borge!"

"You won't be angry with me," said Rose, "if I suggest that you don't know Tommy Borge. I felt the same way about Tommy when I first met him. He seemed shy and conceited, both at the same time. He's honestly afraid of people. That's because he's so sensitive."

"Sensitive!" sneered Dorothy. "A big hulk like that!"

"There's no law on that," commented Rose. "I think you'll find that big men are likely to be the most sensitive people in the world. Anyhow, Tommy is one of them. He feels terribly. Everything hits him hard. He tries to dodge the blows with that air of knowing everything, but it's only an air and the blows land just as effectively. He must have suffered all kinds of torture when he went with you."

"What do you mean by that?"

Was Rose beginning to gloat?

"I guess I'm not especially happy in the way I express things. What I mean is that he loved you, couldn't say so—not for a long time, anyhow—and felt instinctively that you didn't care for him. That hurt him terribly. In a way, it did him good. It made him even more sensitive."

"I'm glad I didn't ruin his life," observed Dorothy,

Symphonie Pathétique

feeling that this piece of irony would place Tommy Borge in his true position.

Rose continued imperturbably.

"What I'm trying to say is that Tommy's sensitivity is his greatest virtue and his greatest drawback. If he weren't so sensitive, he'd be able to make a better impression on people. But, at the same time, if he weren't so sensitive, he wouldn't know people as well as he does. I know he's shy, awkward, scared, clumsy, and all that. But beneath it all, there's something terribly cool and firm, and it tells him just what's what and who's who."

"Do you think he's a great critic?"

"No."

Rose apparently overlooked the sarcasm.

"Technically, he isn't a great critic—and he doesn't pretend to be. But he feels people."

"I've noticed that!"

It was a brilliant, if not an elegant, fling, Dorothy thought. Yet Rose hardly seemed aware of it.

"I wonder if you understand me," she went on sweetly. "Tommy's so sensitive that he knows you—he almost sees into you. And he can bring the best in you out. The tragedy of it is that he can't bring the best in himself out."

"Well, I don't know why I should lecture you on Tommy. I've told you all this because Tommy brought me out. He felt that I wasn't a coloratura. I was sore at first, especially because he couldn't explain why he didn't think I was a coloratura. He said he just felt it. Soedlich—you know him—said Tommy was right."

Soedlich! what would Dorothy have accomplished under Soedlich's instruction? If she had studied with Soedlich!

"Tommy also picked my program. Half of it was new stuff. I liked it and Tommy liked it, but I didn't know

"Our Little Girl"

whether the audience or the critics would. Tommy planned out the whole thing and offered to take the responsibility. And now, when they praise me for my taste and enterprise, I feel a little queer and wonder whether I oughtn't to write a letter to the papers about Tommy's part—except that Tommy would never forgive me."

"Do you care?"

"Yes, I *do* care."

Rose's eyes were grave and she looked strangely ecstatic.

"I care because I love Tommy—the real Tommy—and because I'm going to marry him."

Dorothy kissed Rose. It was the correct thing to do when a young woman made an announcement of this sort.

"I'm so glad to hear it, my dear," she said. "I wish you both all kinds of good luck."

Rose thanked her.

"I don't suppose you'll give up your work," suggested Dorothy.

"Give it up?" Rose giggled.

"Mr. Maxwell told me he'd book me for forty concerts on the strength of the recital. They've raised Tommy for discovering me— isn't that funny? You know, Maxwell didn't want to let me do a recital—he said he'd had enough of St. Cecilia girls—and Tommy held out for me. Tommy and I really ought to do pretty well next year. If we can make enough, I'm going to chase him out of publicity and make him write."

"For the newspapers?"

Dorothy didn't care, but it sounded like an intelligent question.

"A novel, maybe. Whatever he feels he ought to write. There's something in him he ought to express, and I'm going to try to bring it out."

Symphonie Pathétique

So here was a success. Rose, the little flapper, who had spent her training career at road-houses and dancing places, had become a serious artist, one whose success had been so great that she had a tour mapped out for her within a week after her début. And Dorothy, who had studied conscientiously at St. Cecilia's, who had lived a quiet life, had nothing to look forward to except the engagements that the energy of Uncle Elliott's machine might be able to produce. Rose, in a way, was responsible for her downfall. If Rose had not made so deep an impression, Dorothy's failure might not have seemed so disastrous. And, as a climax, Rose was marrying a man whom Dorothy had discarded, whom Dorothy had rejected, whom Dorothy could have had. It was heart-breaking.

Yet Rose had permitted herself to be ruled by Tommy Borge, and a strange ruler he was. Her success was a success brought about by the brains of an insignificant man who had suddenly made a lucky guess. Suppose Tommy had guessed for *her*!

Dorothy knew that a miserable afternoon was ahead of her. Rose would continue to rave about Tommy—it was the way of the recently engaged or recently married—and the mention of Tommy somehow brought back all of the pain which had been created by Dorothy's last recital. She hated Tommy Borge! More and more an idea began to take shape: Tommy had taken Rose in hand, forced her on Maxwell, and boosted her to success to revenge himself on Dorothy for refusing him.

Rose, however, announced that she had an appointment to make phonograph records after luncheon, and disappeared trippingly. Rose was even making records! A week ago no one knew of Rose Manning—and now—and now no one knew of Dorothy Reitz. What perverse fate

"Our Little Girl"

had willed it that this casual acquaintance of her apprentice days should be carried suddenly and swiftly to fame, almost in the moment that all of the thoughtfully worked out scheming and advertising for Dorothy Reitz had been reduced to unwitting mockery by the notices which had followed her recital?

Tommy, recreated from memory, hovered about the suite all of the afternoon. She remembered how he had celebrated her as the "Thursday night girl." She could not resist the temptation to dig the clipping from the depths of an old desk.

"But when Molly suddenly marries somebody else, there is no resentment, unless it be at yourself."

What a child he was when he had written that! No resentment! As though he had not deliberately searched out one who could humble Dorothy! A conceited young scribbler he had been in those days. How he had drawled out stories of his interviews with the great! How many of the great remembered Mister Thomas A. Borge?

And what a pose he had struck when he was in the Underwood bureau! How he had played the busy man, the man who handled beautiful women aggressively—wonder what Rose thought of the pretty creature that always seemed to be in or about the Underwood press department?—and the executive who made singers! And then that afternoon in the chop-house flashed on her mental screen, when Tommy had made the most pitifully abject fool of himself, almost crying, like a baby begging for the moon! What a mixture! Had his social flabbiness obscured his undoubted talents for bringing people forward? Would a scheming soul like Maxwell keep him in his employ if he were not efficient?

Oh, what did it matter? He had his revenge now! Let him enjoy it! Perhaps he had even set certain critics

against her. Was there any way of discovering that? She would expose him to the world as an evildoer and she would explain his motives. She would ruin Rose Manning at the same stroke, perhaps. But what could she prove? And what blow might not Tommy strike in return? Oh, it was a dirty, disgusting business, all of it!

She must not think of it longer. She saw a nervous breakdown approaching. It was not altogether a displeasing prospect. It would explain her withdrawal from the concert stage. At all events, she must get away. She couldn't stand New York, with its noise and its dirt. She couldn't bear to be confronted with the tattered posters which, undaunted, continued to proclaim the virtues of Madame Dorothy Reitz, an American singer for American music lovers.

"You're not looking well, dear."

She could have thanked Arnold for his thoughtful observation. He *did* understand her sometimes. Perhaps she had wronged him when she had thought that he didn't. She must go away with him. Atlantic City would be a suitable retreat.

"You want to go to Atlantic City?"

Arnold smiled genially.

"It's a corking idea, Dot," he assented. "I've noticed you've been looking a little under the weather. Maybe you've been working too hard. I've been going it a little strong at the office myself."

He was so sympathetic.

"Yes, we'll go to Atlantic City."

He stood before her with his hands in his pockets, evidently pleased with her, with an idea and with himself.

"I ought to be on the job, of course," he admitted, "but your health comes first, dear. Come to think of it, I might look into the idea of putting in a branch office

"Our Little Girl"

out there. A lot of people like to do business from Atlantic City."

He sat on the arm of her chair and caressed her.

"Tell you what I'll do," he suggested. "I'll let you fix up everything to suit yourself. Pick your own hotel, tell me when you want to start—and I'll do the rest. How's that?"

She flung her arms about him.

"You're too good to me, Arnold!" she cried.

She wanted to weep, to confess all of the uncomplimentary thoughts that she had harbored about him. But she was too happy to bring up such matters. Arnold was rescuing her. He was her hero.

Everything was strangely exciting and new in Atlantic City. It was like a honeymoon. A dream had come true.

A dream had come true—and when at last they started back to New York she knew that she would give Arnold a son. It would be almost sinful to have a girl. And Arnold agreed with her suggestion that their son be named Elliott Reitz Deering.

XXVI

DA CAPO

It was assumed that the arrival of Elliott Reitz Deering would entail the permanent retirement of Mme. Dorothy Reitz from musical efforts in public. Uncle Elliott, on hearing that "we expect an heir," blushed deeply, thumped Arnold resoundingly by way of congratulation, and then reflected rather plaintively that all of the heavy advance work in the interests of the prima donna would have to be canceled or undone. Still, he consoled himself with the notion that nothing was too good for Dorothy. And when the boy arrived—anything other than a boy was unthinkable to Uncle Elliott—he would be greeted with a fine check administered with proper ritual by a delighted uncle.

Mother Loamford, on hearing of the news, lost interest in the ruins of Europe and hurried back to be at her daughter's bedside, although there were many months to pass before there would be any occasion for her maternal midwifery. After noting that Dorothy had not grown a day older and that she looked wonderful, Mrs. Loamford insisted on a full account of all of the sensations which Dorothy felt, and she seemed somewhat vexed that prenatal conditions had not changed in the last quarter of a century. For several weeks her visits were frequent and prolonged. Then the novelty of being an expectant grandmother wore off, and she amused herself with other things. The burden of her song was simple: She was so glad that she had told Dorothy the Facts of Life. That made matters much easier for everybody.

"Our Little Girl"

Dorothy worried at first about the comments of the public. All of the propaganda which had been spread in her behalf must have made her a public figure, and now everyone would go about whispering that Dorothy Reitz couldn't sing this year because she was going to have a baby. It wasn't a delicate thing to do. That was the life of an artist—anybody else could have a child and no one would consider it anything unusual; when an artist had a child it was forecast in the newspapers and commented on generously by anyone who cared to gossip.

The greatest comfort now was Arnold. He anticipated everything that she wanted; he fulfilled her wishes before they were half uttered; he added little finishing touches that crowned joy with surprise. He was the most thoughtful man that ever lived. He took her to the country of week-ends, and later he installed a companion, Mrs. Campbell, who combined diverting prattle with sound training and experience as a nurse. When the weather turned cold, Arnold insisted on sending Dorothy and Mrs. Campbell to Miami, and later, when a premature spring made New York a sweltering maze, he took them to Atlantic City. There never had been a man like Arnold. Yet he almost resented her protestations of gratitude.

"I'm just doing what any man ought to do for his wife," he explained when Dorothy kissed him repeatedly for some little kindness. "I couldn't do less and hold my head up."

How approaching fatherhood had matured him!

Dorothy couldn't go out very much now, and she hated the stares which the curious cast upon the pregnant.

"Isn't it funny," she remarked to Mrs. Campbell, "how these things work out? When I was singing actively, I used to be angry when people didn't notice me; now I'm irritated when they do."

"But you'll sing again," said Mrs. Campbell. "This doesn't hurt the voice in the least. It helps it. I once had a patient, a singer, who was a soprano. She had twins and her voice changed to contralto. Her husband died a little while later, or she might have become a bass."

Whereat both laughed so loudly that Mrs. Campbell warned Dorothy against too great, mirth lest she strain something.

"I am going to sing again," Dorothy declared. "I am going to continue as though nothing had happened."

"You'll sing better," remarked Mrs. Campbell. "For one thing, you're resting your voice, now."

Arnold listened sympathetically to Dorothy's assurances that she would continue her career.

"We can take all that up after the little fellow comes," he said.

"But I'm going to continue," she predicted, with a menace in her voice.

"Certainly."

Arnold's tone carried little conviction. Could it be that he still didn't understand her?

"Please, Arnold," she begged, "tell me that you want me to continue my career."

Arnold kissed her.

"I certainly do."

But his manner didn't satisfy her. Did he, perhaps, think that she was a pretentious mediocrity? He didn't know anything about music, anyhow, but did he think that she was a failure? She grasped his hands and drew him to her.

"Arnold," she asked, "be honest with me—do you think I'm—do you think I'm a——"

"Failure" wouldn't come to her lips.

Arnold bent over and kissed her tenderly again.

"Our Little Girl"

"No," he murmured, "most decidedly not."

He was so kind!

She would go ahead. She would push on. She would outsing Rose Manning yet! Tommy Borge wouldn't break her just because she hadn't cared for him!

And then she wondered what it was all about and whether it was worth while to fight ahead. An artist had to go through too much. Why should she continue so ignoble a struggle? Arnold was worth all of the triumphs in the world.

But even if she never appeared again, she was an artist. She knew fine things and there was a special place in the world for her. When she looked out of her window in the hotel at night and saw couples strolling vulgarly down the board-walk, arm-in-arm, to disappear into a strange half-darkness, she realized that she was above these things. And now Arnold seemed above these things, too. One night, two familiar figures passed under her window, arm-in-arm, to disappear into the strange half-darkness. They were Rose Manning and Tommy Borge. Rose an artist? She was just like the rest of them, and Tommy Borge—well, he was what he was, unattractive, conceited and spiteful. She wondered whether he would push his head so endearingly into Rose's face if he knew that at this moment the very woman before whom he had cringed in a fit of hopeless love——

If the concert field was full of such people, she didn't care whether she ever sang again. And yet she was an artist. Were there other artists who had been driven out of the field by stupid critics and politics?

She debated the question daily with Mrs. Campbell, who generally ended the argument with the verdict that too much conversation was dangerous in her condition and that she had better lie down for a little while now. And

as the time before Elliott Reitz Deering's début drew shorter, so did the discussions.

Then one morning, artistry, music, politics, everything passed out of Dorothy's mind. And long afterwards, she caught her first glimpse of Elliott Reitz Deering and fancied that he looked like Arnold—a fancy in which Mrs. Campbell encouraged her.

Little Elliott was sleeping in his crib, when Uncle Elliott was permitted to see Dorothy for the first time.

"You came through it like a Trojan!" he declared. "I tell you, we men may think we're the stuff, but for real, honest-to-God guts, you women have it on us every time! Eh, Arnold?"

Arnold agreed.

"And here," continued Uncle Elliott, "is little Elliott's first present."

From the recesses of his cutaway he produced a small toy piano, across which one of his familiar checks had been pinned.

The sight of the toy stirred something in Mother Loamford. She ran from the room and returned with another toy piano and two large books.

"Look," she said, "here's the first toy Uncle Elliott ever gave you, Dorothy. I've saved it all these years. And here's your baby-book which I should have kept longer. And here's one, a nice new one, for little Elliott."

Dorothy looked through the pages of her baby-book.

"I have always wanted to have a daughter who could sing and so give joy to many people; it is such a gift to be able to sing well!"

Mrs. Loamford laughed delightedly as she saw Dorothy glancing at the passage.

"And you see it's come true!" she cried out. "You are a great singer, my baby—you'll always be my baby to me

“Our Little Girl”

—and your little son, my little grandson, may grow up to be a great violinist, perhaps. Your Uncle Elliott took violin lessons when he was a boy—didn’t I ever tell you that?—and it’s such a pity he didn’t continue, because he really did have talent. Now, as soon as you’re strong, you must begin to write little Elliott’s baby-book, because when he grows up, he’ll appreciate it so much——”

Mrs. Campbell intimated silently that Mrs. Loamford had talked enough.

Dorothy listlessly pushed the toys and the books from her bed. She was tired. Her head ached. She wanted to sleep.

Arnold sat with her for a few minutes after the others had gone.

“Arnold,” she said, “I really must start practising again as soon as——”

“Yes, dear.”

“I mean it!”

“Sing all you like, little mother.”

He patted her head.

“But I’m serious about it, Arnold.”

Somehow she felt that she was talking about something unreal, vague, indeterminate. Arnold was promising the moon to quiet her. She must make her purpose clear to him. Didn’t he understand her? Didn’t anybody understand her?

“Arnold, I still have a career to——”

He patted her head again.

“Now, Dot, Mrs. Campbell says excitement is bad for you. Go to sleep, little mother. We can talk about this later, when you’re stronger. There’s so much time!”

THE END



